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THE JEWS OF ASIA

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THE JEWS OF ASIA

Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

BY

SIDNEY MENDELSSOHN,
F.Z.S., F.R.C.I., ETC.

Author of
Mendelssohn's South African Bibliography, *The Jews of Africa*,
Jewish Pioneers of South Africa, etc.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

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MEMOIR OF AUTHOR

SIDNEY MENDELSSOHN died in London after an illness of some months' duration on September 26th, 1917. He had retired from business, that of a diamond merchant in South Africa, about twelve years earlier, and had come to England, there to devote his leisure to reading, to public work, and above all to the collection of his magnificent library of works on South Africa and the compilation of his priceless bibliography based on that collection.

Sidney Mendelssohn was born at Bristol, the son of the minister of the not very numerous Jewish community there. The community being small the means of the minister were not large. However, the care of Jewish parents for the education of their children is proverbial, and this devotion to education which is so general among Jews is, not surprisingly, even more strongly developed among the class to which the parents of the subject of this memoir belonged. Young Mendelssohn therefore had the best education that it was within the means of his parents to give him, and in this connection it must be remembered that his father was a scholar and was therefore able to supplement the instruction which the boy received at school. However, in view of his financial resources he was unable to keep the boy at school as long as he would have wished or to send him to a university, and in those days scholarships tenable at a university for which boys such as Mendelssohn were eligible were very few and far between, and consequently the boy,

like so many of his class and of his day, had to go out early into the world, there to make a way for himself.

When he was still little more than a boy his father went to South Africa, leaving his wife, two daughters, and two younger sons to the care of the subject of this memoir. Sidney Mendelssohn thereupon undertook as much of the work of his father as he could perform. He used to spend hours when other boys of his age were asleep or engaged in recreation in preparing the subjects he had to teach to his pupils on the following day. In due course the boy and the other members of the family followed the father to South Africa. Kimberley was then the El Dorado of British Jewry and it was to Kimberley that young Mendelssohn betook himself. In South Africa, as has already been indicated, he secured for himself a successful career which enabled him to return to England in early middle age with a moderate fortune. In illustration of his life in South Africa we may mention that Sidney-on-Vaal was so named in his honour, and that the public library of the town is a standing monument of his munificence and interest in literature.

Careers such as those of Sidney Mendelssohn are on the whole uneventful so far as the interest of the general public is concerned, and the present case is not exceptional. His literary activities after his return to England are practically the only ones that are of general interest. Mention ought, however, also to be made of the zealous work he performed on behalf of the Liberal Jewish movement and of Anglo-Jewish historical research. An ardent Jew, Mendelssohn, immediately upon taking up his residence in London, became a warm supporter of the former movement, then in its first stages in England, and was for some years prior to his death treasurer of the Liberal Synagogue. He was also during the last years of his life an active

member of the Council of the Jewish Historical Society of England, to whose *Transactions* he contributed a valuable sketch of the history of the Jews in South Africa. Before he left that part of the world he was prominent in masonic circles. Easily first among his literary works is his monumental *Bibliography of South African Literature*, a work which is as complete as any human work can be. Mr. Ian D. Colvin, who wrote an introduction to this work, which, without any fear of exaggeration, may be termed great, said of it after its author's death, " The Mendelssohn *Bibliography* describes in detail practically every book, pamphlet, and paper that in any way concerns South Africa from the time of Vasco da Gama downwards. And it is so arranged, classified, and indexed as to enable the student to find what has been written upon any South African place or problem. It is a guide to the student of South Africa ; it is the foundation of a South African culture ". This praise is high but not higher than the work deserves.

The *Bibliography* was based on a collection of books, which is itself the largest collection of South Africana in existence and is now, in accordance with the terms of the collector's will, the property of the Union of South Africa. Mr. Colvin, writing on the same occasion, said, " As a collector he was omnivorous. He was in touch with every old bookshop of note in Europe ; and went through their catalogues with the eye of a hawk. No doubt his collection contains much that is worthless upon any computation but that of the student who says he wants to read everything on the subject—and there are such students. South Africa will one day have a literature of its own, and a body of scholarship concentrated upon its history, its problems, its humanity, its interests and what we might call its spirit or soul. That body of investigation and expression, that South African scholarship will find the

past of the country, as far as it is known, all charted and mapped out in Mendelssohn's *Bibliography*".

Sidney Mendelssohn's other writings include *Judaic or Semitic Legends and Customs amongst the South African Natives*, which appeared originally in the *Journal* of the African Society and *Jewish Pioneers of South Africa* in the *Transactions* of the Jewish Historical Society of England. When the subject of this memoir died the manuscript on which the present work and its companion volume [1] are based was far advanced towards completion. His widow, aware of the interest her husband had shown in the work, of the devotion with which he had engaged in it, and how great was his natural desire that the results of his years of research should be made public, determined that the work should be completed and published. This task was entrusted to the present writer, who in fulfilling it has considered it his duty to preserve intact the scheme that the author had adopted and to publish with as few changes as possible those portions of the work which the author had apparently considered ready for the press. In these chapters obvious slips and errors only have been corrected. Otherwise the work is untouched. But in a few instances the Editor has added footnotes of his own. These are indicated by square brackets. Two fragments, apparently intended to form part of the Preface, were found among the Author's papers, and it has been thought well to quote them in full as indicating the scope and intention of the work.

> " It is not my intention to attempt an account of the Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What I propose to lay before my readers is an account of the Jewish people at this period, as

[1] *The Jews of Africa* (*Kegan Paul*).

mirrored in the works of English writers who describe the life of Jews not only in England but in other parts of the world in which they have travelled ".

" My work must be considered more a mosaic than an individual literary effort. I have tried to select from the works of many historians such pieces of information as taken together form a connected, coherent, and—to a certain extent—correct record of what has really occurred ".

Sidney Mendelssohn was not a scholar in the technical sense, but he had in him an admiration, a passion, for scholarship. The present work, therefore, is neither learned nor scholarly. It contains little that is original. But it furnishes a record of the Author's very wide reading and of the interest and care that he devoted to that reading. The learned critic may find many opportunities in the following pages for airing his superior knowledge, but no one can deny that the compiler of the present work has collected between two covers very much interesting and useful matter relating to the history of the Jews in Asia which would otherwise have remained hidden. If Mendelssohn has not written a history of the Jewish people in this continent, he has provided in an easily accessible form much material that will prove invaluable to the historian who will one day or other take up the task.

A. M. H.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

IN spite of the fact that even since the final destruction of the Jewish kingdom by the Romans the aims, ideas and, in some instances, even the ideals of the Jews in the various countries in which they have settled have been often divergent and at times bitterly opposed, the many histories of them which have appeared since the time of Josephus have almost invariably represented them as one people as well as of one race and one religion.

The present publication is the first, I believe, that has been attempted on the plan which I have adopted, that is, an endeavour to portray the separate and progressive history of the Jews in the different countries in which they have made their homes, since their expulsion from the land with which they had been identified for something like thirty centuries. In, at all events, the majority of historical works on the Jews the student has to follow the particular Jews he wishes to study through all the mazes of their international wanderings, and finally to dig them out from a lengthy publication, as a schoolboy extracts a German verb from a seemingly interminable sentence. In these pages I have endeavoured to compile a narrative of a great part of what has occurred to the Jews of Asia in the eighteen and a half centuries which have elapsed since Titus did his best to erase the Jews as a political race from the face of the earth. I do not claim to have given accounts of every country or former state in which Jews may have resided to a greater or less extent, within the

limits of the period and continent laid down, but I have, I believe, dealt with all centres of importance in which they have been domiciled in any appreciable numbers in the continent in question. Much of the information contained in this volume is probably unknown to the average educated Jew, to say nothing of the average Gentile. Probably not one Jew in fifty thousand ever heard of the Jewish kings of Abyssinia or the Yemen or of many of the other romantic and perhaps somewhat legendary heroes whom Israel has mustered since the beginning of the Christian era. The ghettoes, ancient and modern, know little of the Gideons of Semen, of Dhu Nuwas of the Yemen, or of Bar Cochba of Palestine. Few of them—at all events of late years—have heard of Sabbathai Zevi, of David Alroy, or of the other great Jews who did their best in the early centuries and in far distant climes to help their brethren.

This work, as I present it, must be regarded as a basis for future augmentation and elaboration by other and abler hands. Scholars possessing deeper knowledge, students trained to keener research, linguists with advantages that I do not possess, and historians with instinctive powers of selection, could produce on these lines a history of the Jews which might have weighty powers of benefit towards the solution of what is known as " the Jewish Question ".

S. M.

CONTENTS

PAGE

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR - - - - - v.
AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION - - - - - x.

CHAPTER I
TURKEY

Introductory Remarks—The Power of the Moslem Empire—The Jews under the Crescent—Joseph Caro—Joseph of Naxos, an Early Zionist—Solomon Ashkenazi, Envoy to Venice—Sabbathai Zevi - - - - - 1

CHAPTER II
TURKEY (*continued*)

Conditions in Turkish Jewry—Testimony of Early Travellers—Nicholas Nicholay, the Geographer—Teixeira in Turkey—Aleppo—The Travels of Four Englishmen—Michel Febre—Master Henry Blount, Gentleman—Thevenot's Anti-Jewish Prejudices - - - - - 25

CHAPTER III
PALESTINE

The Promised Land—Ten Centuries of Jewish Rule—The Roman Occupation—Jerusalem Under the Arabs—The Turkish Conquest—Safed—Four Englishmen and a Preacher—Vital and Lurya—Seventeenth-Century Troubles - 52

CHAPTER IV
PALESTINE (*continued*)

The Jews in Jerusalem—"Apparent Truthes"—Sandys' *Travailes*—The Syrian Tripoli—The Valley of Jehosaphat—David Reubeni—Darker Days in Palestine—Borrowers Instead of Lenders - - - - 63

CHAPTER V
PERSIA

The Iran Faith—Cyrus—Ahasuerus and Esther—Shah Ishmael—Abbas the Great—A Seventy Years' Deal with Abbas II—The Consequences of False Messianism - 73

CHAPTER VI
PERSIA (*continued*)

The Origin of the Persian Jews—Legends of Ispahan—Benjamin of Tudela—Teixeira's Visit to Persia—Thevenot's Account—Benjamin II's Persian Experiences—Sir Thomas Herbert—Sir John (Jean) Chardin—Later Miseries - 88

CHAPTER VII
INDIA

The Cranganore and Cochin Jews—Rabban's Charter—"The Jewish Territorial Organization"—The Malabar Settlements—The Genesis of the Black Jews of Cochin—The "Discovery" of the Beni Israel—David Rahabi, the Revivalist—The Fall of the Jewish State—The Cochin Jews—Other Settlements - - - - 98

Contents

CHAPTER VIII

INDIA (*continued*)

The Charter of the Malabar Jews—The Customs of the Beni Israel—Linschoten and the Jews of India—The Jews of Cochin—Vincent Le Blanc—Stavorinus—The Beni Israel - 113

CHAPTER IX

CHINA

The First Appearance of the Jews—Their Origin—Their Records—Their Present State—The Sect which Extracts the Sinews—Social and Commercial Activities—The Temple at Kai-Fung-Foo—The End of the Settlement - - 133

CHAPTER X

THE YEMEN

First Settlement of the Jews—Ezra and the Jews of the Yemen—A Jewish Dynasty—Wars between Jews and Christians—Subsequent Obscurity - - - - - 164

CHAPTER XI

THE YEMEN (*continued*)

Jewish Kings—Social and Economic Conditions in the Yemen—Present Conditions—Recent Emigration - 174

CHAPTER XII

KURDISTAN

Tiglath Pileser—Nahum, the Prophet—Nineveh—The Sepulchre of Ezra—Benjamin of Tudela's Visit to Kurdistan—David Alroy—Benjamin II's Visits to Kurdistan—Modern Statistics - - - - - 181

CHAPTER XIII

KURDISTAN (*continued*)

Mosul—The Jews of Amadia—The Shrine of Nahum—The Pentecost Celebrations—A Night in Nahum's Sepulchre—Kurdistan under the Turks—The Jews in the Mountains—Benjamin II's Third Journey to Kurdistan—Present Conditions - - - - - - - 190

CHAPTER XIV

MESOPOTAMIA

Hammurabi—The End of the Kingdom of Israel—Defeat of Sennacherib—The End of the Kingdom of Judah—The Restoration by Cyrus—Ezra - - - - 204

CHAPTER XV

MESOPOTAMIA (*continued*)

The Academy of Sora—The Exilarchs—Persecution—The Completion of the Babylonian Talmud—The Princes of the Captivity—The Arabian Conquest—The End of the Gaonate—David Alroy—The Visits of Petachiah of Ratisbon and of Benjamin of Tudela—Unsettled Conditions—The Jews of Kurdistan—Mosul—The Ottoman Turks - - - - - - - 217

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED - - - - - 236

INDEX - - - - - - - - 241

THE JEWS OF ASIA

Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

CHAPTER I

TURKEY [1]

Introductory Remarks—The Power of the Moslem Empire—The Jews under the Crescent—Joseph Caro—Joseph of Naxos, an early Zionist—Solomon Ashkenazi, Envoy to Venice—Sabbathai Zevi.

THE Domain of the Grand Segnieurs—the Ottoman State of the seventeenth century—was an empire vastly different from that ruled over by the Sultan of Turkey three hundred years later, at the period of the great world war of the second decade of the twentieth century. Those very turbulent areas now loosely known as the Balkans, which comprise the kingdoms of Roumania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, together with the somewhat nebulous principality of Albania, were, in the seventeenth century, merely subsidiary provinces of the great Mohammedan empire, a power so puissant that no Slavonic, Teutonic, or Celtic nation at that period could seriously menace its integrity. Apart

[1] The whole of the present (1916) possessions of Turkey in Europe, and Asia, with the exception of Palestine and the Yemen, which are treated separately, are included under this heading.

from these great territories, the African possessions of the Sultan included Tunis, Tripoli, and Egypt (together with more or less clearly defined suzerain rights over Morocco and Algiers), and the Asiatic Provinces, Arabia, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine; all these countries making up an empire by no means inferior in size and importance to the neighbouring dominions of the Great White Czar, or the gigantic country cut off from the rest of the world by the Chinese Wall. The conquests of Solyman the Magnificent had strengthened and consolidated the largest, if not the mightiest, state brought together under one rule since the days of Charlemagne. A witty and observant traveller of this period wrote: "Thus great at this day is the Ottoman Empire: but *too* great for it are their assumed titles: as, God on Earth; Shadow of God; Sole Monarch of the World; King of Kings, Commander of all that can be Commanded . . .", etc., etc.[1]

It is stated that the original Jewish colony in Turkey, as distinct from the outlying provinces, was established in Brusa, or Broussa, in 1326, the settlement having been formed by Sultan Urkham with immigrants brought from Damascus and other parts of the Turkish Empire, to make room for whom, he drove out the former inhabitants.[2] At a later date the

[1] Sandys' *Travailes*, p. 37. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 279.

Jews crossed into Europe with the victorious warriors of the Crescent, and their prosperity under Mohammedan rule brought Jewish refugees to Turkey from nearly every part of Europe to join their ever-increasing numbers.

Writing in the middle of the fifteenth century, " Isaac Zarfati, a Jew who had settled in Turkey, was moved to send a circular letter to the Jewish Communities in Germany and Hungary inviting their members to emigrate to Turkey ". The letter " gives a glowing description of the lot of the Jews " in their proposed new home, the writer observing : " Turkey is a land in which nothing is lacking. If you wish, all can go well with you. Through Turkey you can safely reach the Holy Land. Is it not better to live under Moslems than under Christians ? Here you may wear the finest stuffs. . . . Here every one may sit under his own vine and fig tree. In Christendom, however, you may not venture to dress your children in red or blue without exposing them to the danger of being beaten blue or flayed red ".[1] This communication, arriving at a time of almost general persecution of the Jews, caused an influx into Turkey of Ashkenazi Jews who soon became amalgamated with the earlier Jewish

[1] This interesting letter is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Ancien Fonds), No. 291. *See Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 280.

inhabitants. Even Jerusalem, a town which had contained only a very small Jewish population since the days of the Crusades, soon began to be peopled again by the descendants of its ancestral owners, and many towns of Syria, Arabia, and Palestine attracted prosperous and even wealthy Jewish settlers. As regards the Sephardim, as Graetz remarked, "Every fresh column of smoke rising from the fires of the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal drove Marranos, singly or in groups, far away to the East, to Turkey, beyond the shadow of the cross", and travel-worn and hunted Jews came from many other places besides the Iberian peninsula.[1]

Among the Spanish refugees was the celebrated Joseph Caro, the renowned Talmudist, who, after many migrations, died at Safed in Palestine, in 1575, having compiled a work which has strongly influenced the practice of the Jewish religion, from the more orthodox standpoint, from the time it was written until the present day.[2] During the second half of the sixteenth century, Joseph Nasi, a Marrano of Portugal, rose to great eminence in the Turkish State, where he was made Duke of Naxos by Sultan Selim. He wielded immense influence in the affairs of the Empire, and being granted by the Sultan the town of

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Philadelphia, vol., iv, p. 529.
[2] *Shulchan Oruch*, first published at Venice in 1564.

Tiberias and seven adjacent villages, he resolved to found there a colony which should serve as a rallying-point for Jews and a haven of security for Jewish refugees. In fact Joseph Nasi had similar, though more limited, theories and ideas to those promulgated by Theodor Herzl over three hundred years later. Nevertheless, Nasi's projected Jewish State did not come to maturity Joseph of Naxos was a man of many ambitions and many schemes, and the dream of becoming a ruling monarch dazzled his brain. The hope of being raised to the throne of Cyprus turned his energies into another direction, and Zionism—in this early phase—remained but a theory and one of very limited application. The walls of Tiberias, rebuilt by Joseph Nasi in 1565, were, however, in all probability, strengthened and repaired by his widow who died at the close of the same century. Thevenot, who visited the town half a century later, states, " The Walls of it (Tiberias) having been ruined, a Jewish widow afterwards built new ones in form of a Fort, with its Courtines, and Jews lived there, until about fifteen Years ago, that the Tyrannie of the Turks made them abandon it ". The celebrated French traveller had possibly never heard of Joseph, Duke of Naxos, and his connection with Tiberias, nor of Rayna, his noble and public-spirited widow.[1] Basnage gives a quaint

[1] John de Thevenot, *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant*, Part I.

account of Joseph of Naxos, whom he calls " Michses ", which was his version of Joseph's name in the days when, as a Marrano, he was unable openly to profess Judaism, and was known under his Christian appellation of João Miquez. He tells us of Sultan Selim's half-drunken promise to the Jewish statesman of the sovereignty of Cyprus, and asserts that although " Michses was not made King, as it was promised . . . his Nation had greater Privileges granted them in the Island, which they still preserve, than the Christians ".

The Jewish Duke lost most of his political influence after the death of Sultan Selim, although Amurad, or Murad III, who succeeded him, confirmed Joseph in all his titles and posts.[1] He had negotiated with William the Silent, defied France and seized her ships, suggested, and helped to carry out, the conquest of Cyprus, and exercised considerable ascendancy as a power behind the Turkish throne for nearly a quarter of a century. But he died in comparative oblivion on his estate of Belvedere, childless, lonely, and bereft of power. It is said that, having no children, he was desirous of perpetuating his name by a literary monument, and, associating himself with learned men, he published in Hebrew, under the title of *Ben Porat Joseph*, a discussion which he had had, in former days,

[1] Joseph Ha-Cohen, *La Vallée des Pleurs*, p. 250. (Paris edition, 1881.)

with a Christian theologian on the subject of the truth of Christianity.[1] Some authorities, however, allege that the work was written originally in Spanish and translated into Hebrew, by Isaac Onkeneira. The distinguished bibliographer, Maurice Steinschneider, among other authorities, held this view.[2] In any case, the book was printed at Constantinople in 1577, two years before Nasi died. After Joseph's death, the Sultan on the advice of Sokolli, the Grand Vizier, Joseph's almost lifelong enemy and rival, seized his property, and his widow was left with her comparatively insignificant private fortune to survive her husband for twenty years.

Prominent among the Jewish personages at the Turkish Court in the latter part of the sixteenth century, was Solomon Ashkenazi, or Solomon ben Nathan, a most learned and talented man of Italian descent, who had been Court physician to the King of Poland. After residence for some time in Cracow, he took up his abode in Constantinople, where he attached himself to the party of the afore-mentioned Sokolli. Solomon Ashkenazi was a resourceful and experienced diplomatist and Sokolli employed him in many affairs of great importance. He was finally accredited as Turkish Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Venice,

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[1] Joseph Ha-Cohen, *La Vallée des Pleurs*, p. 251. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 174.

and, as such, signed the treaty of peace between the two states. Ashkenazi appears to have been treated with extreme courtesy and magnificence by the Venetian Government, while the Jews of Venice received him with the utmost joy and enthusiasm. " It was partly due to Ashkenazi's influence that the decree of banishment of Jews from Venice was revoked, July 19th, 1573 ".[1] Ashkenazi had a very successful career, and managed to maintain his position until his death. His tact and his discretion must have been of a very high order as they enabled him successfully to transact " the diplomatic affairs of Turkey with Christian Courts for nearly thirty years ".[2] It is stated that Ashkenazi's wife had some knowledge of medicine, and that after his death, she was called to the sick bed of Sultan Mohammed III, and cured him of smallpox.[3] A curious account of this episode is afforded in Joseph Ha-Cohen's *La Vallée des Pleurs*, in the continuation of the work, which was evidently written soon after the event referred to by " the Anonymous Editor " (Correcteur) : " In the year 1602 Sultan Amurath of Turkey died, and his son Sultan Mohammed, who was only 17 years old, was placed on the throne. . . . One day he fell ill of a malady of a cancerous nature, called by the Christians, Syphilis,

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[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ii, p. 201. [2] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iv, p. 602. [3] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ii, p. 201.

which brought him to the gates of death, when his officers said to him: 'Will you let us seek, for your majesty, a woman who is skilful in medicine, and can aid you in battling with your grave ailment; she will be able, perhaps, to render you all necessary personal service, as well as stem your complaint'. The advice pleased the Sultan, and it was immediately put into effect. At this period, a lady was residing in Constantinople who was held in as great esteem as ladies of the Royal House; she was the widow of the illustrious Prince Rabbi Salomon ben Natan, d'Udine,[1] (may his memory be blessed!) who had formerly been sent as Ambassador to Venice by Sultan Selim. This lady possessed great knowledge, and was very well versed in the preparation of remedies against this particular disease. When she took up her position in the palace, she contrived to introduce into the favourite dishes of the Sultan, the medicines she considered most efficacious against his complaint and she was very successful in attaining her object. The Sultan evinced much regard for the lady who had done so much for him; he gave her presents suitable to his rank in life, and all his princes followed his example.

"In the year 1605, her son, the bounteous Rabbi Natan ben Salomon, wishing to visit Venice during his

[1] Udine, in Italy, where the family of Ashkenazi had settled after leaving Germany.

tour, took his passage on a ship bound for that place, when the Sultan (may God increase his glory!) gave him a letter to the Grand Council of Venice, then presided over by the Doge Grimani. When he arrived, he presented the letter to the Council, who received him with great honour; he then proceeded to the Levantine Synagogue, where he offered up prayers, and made gifts for the Poor of the Holy Land, (may they soon be restored to their country), as also to the indigent inhabitants of Venice. (Remember us, O God, with thy favour.)"

After the deaths of Joseph Nasi and Solomon Ashkenazi, the influence of the Jews in Turkey sensibly diminished. The glorious times of the sixteenth century were followed by a period during which the Jews of Turkey keenly felt the loss of their former powerful protectors. Neglect, followed by oppression, took the place of power and prosperity. In the meantime the Israelites, brooding over their sorrows and musing over their happy experiences of the previous century, were led by mystics and visionaries to put their faith in the imminence of a coming Messiah and the fulfilment of ancient prophecies announcing the revival of the Jewish nation in the near future. Leaders of the type of Solomon Molko, Israel Lurya, and Hayyim Vital, together with many others, had prepared their brethren in faith, by enunciations of cabbalistic and messianic

doctrines, for the fulfilment of hopes of earthly grandeur and political domination, and these prognostications and predictions rapidly centred in a personality whose name and authority were soon to become famous throughout a large portion of the countries included in three continents.

Sabbathai Zevi, the most prominent and notorious of Jewish pseudo-Messiahs, was born at Smyrna, in Asia Minor, in the year 1626.[1] Although the family came from the Morean Peninsula, it was of Spanish descent, and had probably become impoverished by banishment or enforced migration. At all events, Mordecai Zevi, the father of Sabbathai, had been a poor poulterer in the Morea, but after his removal to Smyrna he became a financial agent, and gradually amassed wealth. He was prone to consider his good fortune as a blessing brought to him through the good deeds and merits of his son. Sabbathai had an attractive appearance and excellent manners, but, at all events in the early part of his life, he was considered to have been averse from the society of women. Nevertheless, he was married in his youth, but he neglected his wife so that she divorced him ; a second, and more beautiful consort, met with no better fate. In the course of his eventful life, he appears to have been married no less than four times.

[1] Basnage observes that Sabbathai Zevi was born at Aleppo, but no other authority supports the statement.

Sabbathai's misogynist and ascetic ideas, coupled with his deep study of the Cabbala and its commentaries, attracted around him a large and growing circle of admirers and disciples. He was made a rabbi at the early age of eighteen and appears to have been regarded almost at once as a saint by some of his more enthusiastic followers. These indiscreet and injudicious adherents flattered and excited the ambition and the credulity of the young Cabbalist to an extraordinary degree. The general anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, which had been aroused by the predictions of Lurya and his disciples, was a constant source of conversation in all Jewish circles, and Sabbathai soon became a convinced believer in the speedy advent of the Millennium. The effect of his constant study of the Cabbala, together with the unusual deference shown by those around him, began to affect his prudence and his penetration. The works of Lurya strangely excited his spiritual and mental activities and he finally began to be inwardly persuaded that he himself was the subject of all these auguries and prophecies and was indeed the promised Redeemer who was to come to Zion. Strengthened by this conviction, and desiring to place a seal on his acts which should give confidence to his disciples, he assumed one of the prerogatives of the ancient High Priests in the use of the Tetragammaton, or the name

of God, forbidden to Jews since the earliest days of the Faith.

The Smyrna College of Rabbis watched the spiritual extravagances of Sabbathai and his disciples with close attention and eventually banished them from the city in the year 1651. Of his career during the next few years nothing is known: he had ample means and probably thought it best—for the time being—to live quietly and unostentatiously in Constantinople, at the same time maturing his plans, and probably adding to his great knowledge of Cabbalistic lore. During this period of his residence in the Turkish capital, he met with a poor, but cunning, Rabbi, Abraham Jachini, who was known as an able preacher. Jachini supported Sabbathai in his phantasies and produced an ancient manuscript in which the pseudo-Messiah's advent was clearly and specifically prophesied. The latter now appeared to be more persuaded than ever that he was the real Messiah, but he gradually realized that Constantinople was certainly not the best scene for his apotheosis and he decided to visit Salonica, a town well known for its sympathetic proclivities towards Jewish mystics and Jewish mysticism. Here again, Sabbathai's religious eccentricities caused him to fall foul of the rabbis and he was once more forced to change the place of his abode. The sufferings he endured during these successive

banishments undoubtedly formed a certain part of his moral equipment ; but they also probably reminded students and mystics of the trials and indignities endured by the founder of the Christian religion and sustained him personally in his belief that these hardships were only the prelude to the power and the glory which would fall to his lot when he should be universally recognized as the true Messiah.

After leaving Salonica, Sabbathai journeyed to Cairo, where he was morally and financially supported by the wealthy and powerful Raphael Joseph, the *Tshlebi*, and from thence he proceeded to Jerusalem, where he adopted many means of endearing himself to the Jewish masses. Returning for a short visit to Cairo, he obtained pecuniary assistance from Raphael Joseph, in order to meet the exactions of a Turkish official on the Jews of the Holy City, to which he returned in triumph in 1665. The long prophesied great day of the coming of the Messiah was supposed to be near at hand. All over Europe, and Asia, Jews —many of them learned and saintly Rabbis—were obsessed by the belief that the restoration of the Jewish nation was rapidly approaching. Even the wise and sober Menasseh ben Israel held this view, and in writing to Oliver Cromwell remarked that Jews and Christians alike " believe that the restoring of our Nation into their Native Countrey, is very near at

hand . . . before the MESSIA come and restore our Nation . . . we must have our seat here (England) likewise ".[1]

The Messianic movement in Turkey had recently attracted a young, wealthy, and eloquent enthusiast named Nathan Ghazzati; its adherents increased rapidly day by day. But it soon became evident that Jerusalem was not the ideal centre from which Sabbathai's plans could be most speedily and judiciously furthered. The local rabbis were mostly antagonistic and Sabbathai judged it safer to return to Smyrna—visiting Aleppo on the way—to be received by the enthusiastic plaudits of the large Jewish population then congregated in that city. Ultimately, after some hesitation and delay, he was proclaimed as " The Expected Messiah " on the Jewish New Year's Day of 1665, amid the joy and enthusiasm of his numerous followers, and before long his popularity enabled him to rule over the whole of the Jewish community of Smyrna. He was assisted in his schemes and projects by his third wife, Sarah, whose innovations on Eastern customs had exercised an extraordinary influence on men and women alike, their newly-acquired freedom being the cause of much criticism and comment throughout the general Jewish Community. Nevertheless, the prevailing frenzy was

[1] *The Humble Addresses of Menasseh Ben Israel.*

by no means universal, and many of the rabbis, and other notables of Smyrna denounced Sabbathai as an impostor, despite the danger which attached itself to any serious opposition to a movement characterized by such rapid success and ever-growing strength. The belief in the new Messiah, however, gradually spread throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa, and renowned rabbis throughout the whole of the Old World ranged themselves under his banner. " His popularity grew with incredulous rapidity, as not only Jews, but Christians also, spread his story far and wide. His fame extended to all countries. Italy, Germany, and Holland had centres where the Messianic movement was ardently promulgated ; and the Jews of Hamburg and Amsterdam received confirmation of the extraordinary events in Smyrna from trustworthy Christians. . . . Even Spinoza himself entertained the possibility that with this favourable opportunity, the Jews might re-establish their kingdom and again be the Chosen of God ".[1]

In the meantime Sabbathai's followers worked unceasingly for the promulgation and development of the Messianic cause. Ghazzati in Palestine, and Primo (Sabbathai's secretary), in Smyrna, sent messages to their co-religionists all over Europe and Asia. All Jewry was excited at the marvellous accounts of the

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xi, p. 221.

new Redeemer, and the hopes that centred in his advent. Jacob Sasportas, then Haham or Chief Rabbi of London, who was, however, residing at Hamburg on account of the Plague,[1] was one of the few rabbis of eminence who absolutely condemned Sabbathai as an impostor and worked incessantly to expose the fraud in every Jewish community which his communications could reach. In the midst of their triumphs, however, Sabbathai and his adherents took a course which, in alienating many orthodox followers, led the way to the ultimate ruin of the movement and to the pseudo-Messiah's personal downfall. The new phase commenced with an order from Sabbathai to abolish certain fast days, and this was followed by an attack on Rabbinical legislation, and the Code of the *Shulchan Oruch*.[2] Later, Samuel Primo " despatched circulars and ordinances in the name of the ' Messianic King ' ", and " often used the signature, ' I, the Lord, your God, Sabbathai Zevi ' ". These and other examples of heterodox and blasphemo uspretensions alienated many followers in Smyrna, and the local opposition eventually became so strong that the civil powers intervened, and Sabbathai Zevi was again forced to leave the scene of his labours. Some time before his departure, thrones had actually been erected for

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. v, p. 149. [2] *See* Note I. on p. 44.

Sabbathai and his wife, and he had ordered the name of the Ottoman Emperor to be erased from the prayers and his own to be substituted for it. He had styled himself " King of the Kings of Israel ". Joseph Zevi, his brother, was denominated the " King of the Kings of Judah ", while his other brother, Elijah Zevi, received the title of " King of Kings ".[1] Sabbathai had divided the world between twenty-six faithful adherents, of whom his brothers were to receive the lion's share, and, these important details being thus settled, he set sail for Constantinople in the company of some of his followers and his secretary, while " a multitude of Jews travelled over land to meet him again at Constantinople".[2] The journey lasted thirty-nine days, and the ship being damaged as well as delayed by bad weather, had to put in at a port in the Dardanelles, where the pseudo-Messiah is said to have been bastinadoed by the Grand Vizier's instructions. From here he was taken to Constantinople where he was roughly received by a Pasha, and he was finally brought before the deputy-vizier who sent him to a Jewish prison where he was confined for two months. His followers, however, were by no means disconcerted, asserting that the sufferings which he encountered were a necessary condition of his glorification.

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[1] *See* Note II. on p. 45. [2] *The History of Three Late Famous Impostors*, by J(ohn) E(velyn).

The prophets continued to proclaim the speedy redemption of Sabbathai and of all Israel.

The excitement of the Jews in the Turkish capital ultimately became so intense that the Grand Vizier, Ahmed Coprili, decided that Sabbathai should be removed to the State prison in the Castle of Abydos, in the Dardanelles, at which place he arrived, accompanied by Samuel Primo and a few other attendants, on April 19th, 1666. Here he appears to have resided in great comfort, the large remittances forwarded by rich supporters enabling him to live in very good style. His wife was allowed to remain with him and they held a kind of court in their prison palace. People from all parts flocked to see the new Messiah and many thousands of visitors made Abydos—for the time—a renowned place of resort. Graetz records that on July 25th, 1666, no less than 4,000 Jews assembled there, and celebrated a new feast instituted to replace the Fast of Tamuz which Sabbathai had ordered to be discontinued. "During this time of confinement, Sabbathai had leisure to compose and institute a new method of worship for the Jews, and principally the manner of the celebration of the day of his Nativity. . . ."[1]

The persistence of the Messianic movement and the constant excitement of the Jews caused some anxiety

[1] *The History of Three Late Famous Impostors*, by J(ohn) E(velyn). *See* also Note III. on p. 47.

to the Sultan, his Vizier, and his other principal officers. It was, however, not thought desirable to make short work of the impostor, as his death would probably have been regarded as that of a martyr and have possibly led to open disturbance or secret sedition. On the other hand, Sabbathai's followers noisily boasted that the authorities had no power of death over the Messiah, and pointed to the almost reverential treatment accorded to him by the usually rigorous authorities of Abydos. But the end was at hand. A Polish Jew, named Nehemiah Cohen, who had been admitted to the confidence of the pseudo-Messiah, but had eventually quarrelled with him, betrayed certain "fantastic and treasonable designs" to some prominent Turkish officials and a plan was devised to put a speedy termination to Sabbathai's phenomenal career. Suddenly an imperial messenger arrived at Abydos. Under his directions, the prisoner's entourage and his friends were sent away. Then the Messiah was taken to Adrianople where he was confronted with a renegade Jew who held the appointment of physician to the Sultan, and who advised him to embrace the Mohammedan religion in order to escape the terrible tortures which awaited him in case of his refusal. Sabbathai, terrified and humiliated, agreed to the proposal and the next day he was brought before the Sultan, in whose presence his conversion to the Mohammedan

faith was formally carried out. At the same time, his wife Sarah also apostatised. The couple received rich gifts from the Sultan and Sultana, and Sabbathai was appointed to a minor position at the court, with which he received a high salary. A few days later he had the audacity to write to his brothers in Smyrna to the following effect: "God has made me an Ishmaelite; He commanded, and it was done, the ninth day of my regeneration".[1]

It seems almost incredible that the news of this final act of Sabbathai did not put an end to the movement Sabbathai led, or terminate his Messianic career. The very boys in the streets of Turkey jeered at the Jews, but still some of his followers maintained that "Sabbathai had not turned Mahometan; a phantom had played that part, while he, himself, had retired to Heaven, or to the Ten Tribes, and would soon appear again to accomplish the work of Redemption".[2] Nevertheless, the greater number of prominent rabbis and many other followers were completely disillusioned, while the shame, misery, and disappointment of the Jews was very bitter. In the meantime, Sabbathai appears to have played a double rôle, and, while converting a few of his former co-religionists to the principles of Islam, imbued many Mohammedans with

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[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xi, p. 224. [2] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. v, p. 156.

Cabbalistic doctrines, endeavouring—as it would appear—to form a Judæo-Turkish sect, whose followers would implicitly believe in him.[1] For a considerable time, Sabbathai succeeded in making dupes of members of both the faiths, and Milman asserts,[2] that "St. Croix had frequently heard him preach in the Synagogue, and with so much success, that scarcely a day passed but the Jews seized the turbans from the heads of the Turks and declared themselves Mussulmans". Ultimately, however, the Turkish authorities became aware of Sabbathai's deceptions and grew tired of his schemes. The rabbis too—those who had never believed, and those who had ceased to believe—threatened his followers with excommunication [3] and gained the ear of the Sultan, and Sabbathai's day was finally over. He was deprived of his salary, and ultimately was banished from Adrianople, and sent again to Constantinople. Here, his third wife Sarah, who had been his constant partner throughout the days of his power and in the days of his peril, sank and died, but he lost little time in selecting another bride (a daughter of a learned Talmudist of Salonica), who also embraced Mohammedanism. Finally, being discovered in the act of worship with some of his former co-religionists, he was once more banished, this time to

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[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xi, p. 224. [2] Milman, *History of the Jews*, p. 584. [3] *See* Note IV. on p. 49.

Dulcigno in Albania, "where no Jews dwelt", and here (according to Graetz, and the *Jewish Encyclopedia*), he is supposed to have died alone and abandoned, in the year 1676. Milman, Jost, and other writers, however, assert that he met his death at Belgrade, and Jost adds that, according to some authorities, he was secretly beheaded.

Generally speaking, the mad phase which had overrun all Asiatic and European Jewry was little interfered with by the authorities, outside of the one country where the impostor might have made serious mischief. As Graetz puts it, "The Jews . . . were quietly allowed to make themselves ridiculous", and although at one time there was a danger that the Turkish Government might have sanctioned an attack on the Jews, the matter blew over, in spite of the "absurd dreams of a National Messiah". Basnage remarks that the history of the movement indicates "how far an Impostor may carry his impudence, and the People their credulity", but amazing to relate, the craze survived the death of the impostor, and traces of the movement may be discerned up to the present day in Salonica and other places in the Near East. Among later defenders of the pseudo-Messiah may be mentioned Abraham Michael Cardoso, whose activities in Turkey were extended to a period subsequent to

Sabbathai's change of faith, which Cardoso justified under the doctrine of atonement.[1]

The later part of the seventeenth century in Turkey was characterized by a series of misfortunes for the Jews which extended far into the following century. Long before the culmination of Sabbathai's mad career, Safed had been destroyed by the Arabs and the Jews had suffered severely, while in the same year (1660) there was a great fire in Constantinople in which they endured heavy losses. Gradually the superficial prosperity of the Jews of Turkey waned, and finally disappeared, and early in the eighteenth century, prohibitory enactments were instituted against them. "The Glory had departed".

[1] [Those Jews who, following Sabbathai's example, adopted Mohammedanism kept closely to themselves and adopted a form of religion which combined many of the practices and teachings of both Judaism and Mohammedanism. They were known as Donmeh, and as a special sect have survived to the present day, especially in Salonica.]

CHAPTER II

TURKEY (*continued*)

Conditions in Turkish Jewry—Testimony of Early Travellers—Nicholas Nicholay, the Geographer—Teixiera in Turkey—Aleppo—The Travels of Four Englishmen—Michel Febre—Master Henry Blount, Gentleman—Thevenot's Anti-Jewish Prejudices.

THE high-water mark of Jewish prosperity in Turkey was attained in the last quarter of the sixteenth century; subsequently the well-being of the Jews there declined as the Turkish Empire itself deteriorated in strength and importance. As a matter of fact even when Joseph Nasi and Solomon Ashkenazi were at the height of their power, their influence could not always prevent acts of injustice being perpetrated against the Jews by Turkish officials in various parts of the Empire. The standard of civilization throughout the state was always low and the masses illiterate and bigoted. In addition, there was no real unity among the Jews themselves; they had migrated from many lands and had brought with them diverse customs, distinct opinions, and dissimilar liturgies, and each section clung with an obstinate

tenacity to its peculiar formulas. Furthermore, the position of the Jews "did not rest on fixed laws or conditions, but depended wholly on the caprice of individual rulers".[1] Thus their status was determined by the attitude of the governor of a town, or the dictates of a pasha or a province, instead of by the common law of the country.

Many European travellers visited the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and there is no lack of information regarding the condition of the Jews of Turkey during this period. It must be observed, however, that the accounts are characterized by considerable animus against the Jewish population, and it is a somewhat rare occurrence to find any of the sixteenth or seventeenth-century travellers who had a good word to say about the Jews of Turkey.

Soon after the middle of the sixteenth century, a certain Nicholas Nicholay, sometimes styled Nicholas Nicholay Daulphinios, who had been French Ambassador to Solyman the Magnificent and had returned to France, was sent back to Turkey as Ambassador by the French King, and he wrote a long account of his voyages and travels and his diverse experiences in Turkey and the other countries that he visited. He appears to have been of very considerable

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xiii, p. 280.

knowledge and judgment and was styled "Lord of Arfeuille, Chamberlain and Geographer in Ordinary to the King of France". A translation of his work was published in the *Harleian Collection of Voyages*, compiled from the Library of the Earl of Oxford, and published about the middle of the eighteenth century.[1]

Nicholay states that the number of Jews living in Turkey in general, and in Constantinople in particular, was almost incredible. As a matter of fact, their business and their numbers increased daily, and he observed that "at the present day (circa 1550), they have in their hands the most and greatest traffic of merchandise and ready money that is in the Levant. And likewise the shops and warehouses, the best furnished with all rich sorts of merchandises, which are in Constantinople, are those of the Jews. Likewise they have amongst them workmen of all arts and handicrafts most excellent, and especially of the *Maranes*,[2] of late banished and driven out of Spain and Portugal, who, to the great detriment and damage of Christianity, have taught the Turks divers inventions, crafts, and engines of war, as to make artillery, harquebuses, gun-powder, shot, and other ammunition; they have also there set up printing, not before seen in those

[1] *A Collection of Voyages and Travels . . . compiled from the curious and valuable Library of the late Earl of Oxford.* London, Thomas Osborne. 2 vols., folio, 1745. [2] [Marranos, crypto-Jews of Spanish or Portuguese origin.]

countries. . . ." The French Ambassador railed against the Jews as loudly as any other writer in the sixteenth century, charging them with " malice, fraud, deceit, and subtle dealing, exercising execrable usuries amongst the Christians ", but above all, with refusing to " acknowledge the brightness and Light of Jesus Christ, whom, through misbelief, envy, and unmeasured rage, they condemned and caused to die ". He maintained that there were more Jewish than Turkish physicians in Constantinople and observed that many of them were learned in theory and skilled in practice. Their knowledge of languages, particularly Greek, Arabic, Chaldee, and Hebrew, rendered them better able to study than their Turkish competitors. The Jewish physicians wore yellow turbans, and this head-dress was also compulsory on the Jews of Salonica, who are stated to have been very numerous, and to have possessed no less than eighty synagogues.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Jewish quarter of Salonica was devastated by a great fire which destroyed eight thousand houses and eighteen synagogues.[1] But the Community soon recovered from the blow and gradually increased in importance until the Sabbathai Zevi movement caused strife and dissension among the Jews of the ancient city. Mr Elkan Adler remarks that " When Sabbathai Zevi

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. x, p. 658.

turned the heads of Oriental Jews and others in 1666 . . . the Salonica Jews caught the craze very badly, and a large number followed their hero in his conversion to Islam. They became Turks to outward show, and to this very day (1905), their descendants, of whom there are said to be two hundred and fifty families in the city, are known as *Donmé* or converts. I saw them smoking outside their open shops on Saturday, but was assured that they were crypto-Jews, and practise all they can of Judaism at home. They do not marry with the Turks, by whom, indeed, they are viewed with much suspicion. I spoke to one of them in Hebrew and he evidently understood though he protested he was a Turk ".[1]

Another interesting sixteenth-century traveller was Pedro Teixeira, a Portuguese Marrano who is supposed to have died in Antwerp about the middle of the seventeenth century. Teixeira makes no allusion to his religion in his account of his journeys, but it is interesting to note a remark of his in connection with the attitude of the Mohammedans to Christ. He had noticed " a little house like a hermitage " not very far from Bassorah, and asked what it was. " They said that it was dedicated to Içа ben Mariam, that is, Jesus, the son of Maria ; and showed me much land and many palm-groves, assigned to its support and service.

[1] *Jews in Many Lands.*

Whereat I wondered ; for though I knew that the Moors honour him greatly and call him Ruyalah, that is ' The Breath of God ', I had never known them to dedicate a temple to him ".[1] Dr M. Kayserling,[2] and the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, both remark that Teixeira says nothing about the Jews of Bassorah, but as a matter of fact he states very distinctly that " No Jew or Christian may dwell " amongst the inhabitants, for they bear mortal hate to these, and no less to all Moors not of their own sect ". Further testimony regarding the bigoted character of the natives of this part of Turkey is given by Teixeira in his account of Mexat Oçem, or Mam Oçem, where the people are represented as mortally hating " all other sects and laws, as well of Moors as of Christians and Jews. None of these two last live in the land, and if one but chance to pass through it, he is very ill-looked on ". In the vicinity of this town Teixeira was shown the tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel, and two centuries later, the traveller Benjamin II,[3] gave a description of the sepulchre, in the account of his wanderings, in which he states that the prophet was buried in a town named Kabur-Kefil, " near the

[1] *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira* (Hakluyt Soc.), p. 31. [2] I. J. Benjamin, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*—Introduction by Dr M. Kayserling, pp. 169-170. [3] [Benjamin II, whose real name was Joseph Israel (1818-1864), was a Roumanian Jew who assumed the name in imitation of Benjamin of Tudela, the renowned Jewish traveller of the twelfth century. He set out on his first journey, in search for the Lost Ten Tribes, at the age of twenty-six. He died in London when about to start on a journey of discovery to the lost Jews of China.]

River Euphrates, several hours' journey from the ruins of Babylon ".[1]

Teixeira employed a broker who was called " Mostafa, a Jew turned Turk, in whom the Portuguese and Venetian men of business put much faith ". He arranged with him for his journey to Bagdad, and *en route* observes, " Yet had we in advance, certain Jews of the Caravan with an Arab. . . . These go ahead, that they may rest on their Sabbath (when they may not march) without falling in rear of the Caravan ". He states that " there may be two or three hundred houses of Jews (in Bagdad) whereof ten or twelve profess to be remnants of the first captivity. Some of them are well-to-do, but most of them very poor. They dwell in liberty in their own ward, and have a *Kanis* or Synagogue ". (Kayserling, commenting on this statement, suggested that the *Kanis* referred to was perhaps the *Kenisa Gdolah des Rosch Hagolah*, a Synagogue mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela many centuries previously, when the Jewish population of the town was considerably greater, and included something like a thousand families.) At Mexat Aly, we are told there was " a great street, filled on both sides by gold-and-silver-smiths, all Moors ". It is stated that Giovanni Botero [2] alleged that the Jews " won entry " to many

[1] *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.* [2] Giovanni Botero, *Relations Universali*, second ed. Lib. III, § iii, p. 158.

towns by practising the trade of goldsmiths and silversmiths, an art forbidden to the Moors, and Teixeira remarks, " I do not know where he got this information, whereof we observe the contrary in many places ". Nevertheless, the majority of travellers agree in stating that Mohammedans were prohibited from engaging in trades connected with the manufacture of gold, silver, and jewellery in general. At Ana, an ancient town of Asia Minor, Teixeira found one hundred and twenty houses inhabited by Arabian Jews " who ", he remarks, " are not rich but live decently, and are well looked upon by the Lord of the Land and his officers ; albeit, as usual, this costs them something. But they have houses and lands of their own like the Moors, who make up the rest of the people ". At Aleppo, it is observed that the houses of some of the Jews, in common with those of the Greeks and the Armenians, are " fit to harbour princes ". Many Jewish traditions would appear to have lingered about this old Arabian city ; the Patriarch Abraham is supposed to have made it his residence for a considerable period, and some centuries later, King David's general, Joab,[1] is said to have erected a fortress which was still in existence at the time of Teixeira's visit. At this period, the " mint and custom house " were " farmed

[1] Benjamin II states that a local tradition ascribes the building of the temple at Aleppo to " Joab, the general of David ". *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, pp. 70-78.

and managed by Jews ", who owned " a thousand good houses in a ward of their own, within the walls. They have a great Synagogue,[1] which they affirm to be of fifteen hundred years' standing. Many of them are rich, most are merchants, some brokers or craftsmen, such as lapidaries, silversmiths, and of the like trades ".

Pietro della Valle, who visited Aleppo in the year 1625, remarks: On the morning of August 3rd, " I went to see the Synagogue of the Jews at Aleppo, fam'd for fairness and antiquity. Their street is enter'd into by a narrow Gate, and lyes so much lower than the rest, that it is descended to by a considerable number of steps. After I had gone through many of their narrow lanes, which they contrive so, purposely to hide the goodness of the building from the Turks, I came at length to the Synagogue,[2] which is a good large square uncover'd Court, with cover'd Walks or Cloysters round about, upheld by double Pillars dispos'd according to good Architecture. On the right hand of the entrance, is a kind of great Hall, which they make use of for their Service in the Winter, when it is cold, or rains ; as they do of the Court in Summer and fair weather. In the middle of the Court four

[1] *See* next footnote. [2] Mr Elkan Adler asserts, in *Jews in Many Lands*, that the main structure of the Synagogue was erected (on the authority of Abbé Chagnot) in the fourth century ; one inscription in the building—according to local legends—is dated 345 A.D., but the probable actual date, according to Mr Adler, is 834 A.D.

Pillasters support a Cupoletta, under which in a high and decent place, like our altar, lyes the volume of the Law, and there also their Doctor and principal *Rabbi* stands reading in a kind of musical tone, to whom all the people alternatively answer. They stand in a very great number dispers'd in the Court, Cloysters, and Hall, with their bonnets on their heads, and promiscuously like us in our Churches, Men and Women together (though I have sometimes seen it otherwise in Italy); yet they are mixt in such order that those of one family Men and Women stand all together; and I believe too, they have their peculiar places and benches to sit upon. Moreover, the right side of the Synagogue was fill'd with Jews originaries of the Country from ancient time; but the left, with European Jews, who although inhabitants, and marry'd at Aleppo, yet are originally adventitious; and these are all Spaniards, and speak Spanish for their natural Language; yea many of them were born and bred up if not in Spain or Portugal, at least in Italy, Germany, or other Countries of Christendom. I was carry'd to see this Synagogue by a Jew named *Baruch*, or in our Language *Blessed*, whom I had known at my last being at *Aleppo*. He was born and bred in *Mantua*, a man well qualifi'd danc'd, play'd, and sung competently well; and upon these accounts came to my familiarity. We sat together a good while in the Synagogue amongst his

fellow-Jews, beholding their Ceremonies, and after I had seen enough, I went away and left *Baruch* at his devotions ".[1] Basnage states that a large number of Jews lived in Aleppo and that on their public festivals they gave shows to devote the day for the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire, or for the birth of the Sultan's children, and thereby to increase their interest at Court, and particularly with the Governor on whom they depended.

Vincent Le Blanc, who also travelled through Turkey early in the seventeenth century, visited many places possessing Jewish inhabitants at that period. He mentions a village near Mount Sinai, called Jusoreh, which was " inhabitated allmost by Jews onely ". He does not give a good account of them, and remarked that they were crafty, malicious, dishonest, and only half clothed; in short, he draws a particularly unfavourable picture of the Israelites residing in this Arabian village. Nor was he better pleased with those he met with in other parts of the country, and he asserts that " The Jewes that inhabited those places are such cheates, they sophisticate all that comes through their hands ". Le Blanc was entertained at Zibit by a Jewish merchant, whom he suspected of designs on his purse, merely because of his courteous

[1] *The Travels of Sig. Pietro della Valle . . . into East-Indies and Arabia Deserta.* London, folio, 1665.

conduct to him, which he evidently could not understand without some ulterior object or prospect of gain.

Perhaps one of the quaintest of the British books of travels to the East, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, is the little black letter quarto written by Theophilus Lavender, and published in London in 1612. Lavender, who is merely the editor of the work, states that "Sultan Mahomet, the Grand Chan of Turkey, and the fourteenth of the Line of Ottoman", when he captured Constantinople, resolved to make it a great city and the seat of his Empire, and in accordance with this resolve, "he permitted everyone to live there according to the institutions and precepts of such religion as it pleased them to observe, and to exercise with all safety, their handicrafts and merchandises; which ministred an occasion unto an infinite multitude of Jewes and Marranes, driven out of Spain, for to come and dwell there. By meanes whereof in a very short time the City began to increase in trafficke, Riches and abundance of people".[1] As a matter of fact, it is stated that at this period there were "as many Grecians and Hebrues as Turkes" in Constantinople, but, in the author's opinion, as "the Jewes, so also the Greeks to this day, are without a King . . . both they and their Patriarchs are but slaves to the great Turke". It is observed that "there are many Jewes in

[1] *The Travels of Foure English Men and a Preacher.*

Turkey

Constantinople, Aleppo, Damascus, Babylon, Grand Cayro, and every great City and place of merchandise throughout all the Turks' dominions, who are knowne by their hats, for they were accustomed to weare red hats without brims at my first coming: But lately (the head Vizier being their enemy) they are constrained to weare hats of blew cloth because red was accounted too stately and princelike a colour for them to weare. . . . They are called by three names, which were given to them of old, First they are called Hebrews. . . . Secondly they were called Israelites. . . . Thirdly they were called Jewes . . . they are of more vile account in the sight of Turks than Christians; in so much that if a Jew would turne Turk, he must first turne Christian before they will admit him to be a Turk. . . . And the poore Christians sojourning and dwelling in these parts do hate them very uncharitably and irreligiously . . . for on good Fryday in many places (especially at Zante) [1] they throw stones at them, insomuch that they dare not come out of their houses all that day, and yet are scarce in safety in their houses, for they use to throw stones at their windowes and doores, and on the roofe of their houses". . . .

Sandys [2] also mentions the Jews of Zante and observes "the Jews have here a Synagogue (of whom

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[1] Teixeira mentions that there were thirty or forty houses of Jewish merchants in the Island of Zante. [2] Sandys' *Travailes.*

there are not many) "—it is presumed that he means Jews and not synagogues—" one having marryed an English-woman, and converted her to his Religion. They wear a blue ribband about their hats for a distinction ". Some reference is made by Lavender to the Jewish dietary laws which appear to have been rigidly kept, and it is remarked that the Jews " observe still all their old Ceremonies and feasts, sacrifices only excepted, which the Turks will not suffer them to doe: for they were wont amongst them to sacrifice children, but dare not now for feare of the Turks. Yet some of them have confessed, that their Physitians kill some Christian patient or other, whom they have under their hands at that time, instead of a sacrifice ". Evidently the blood-accusation had found its way to the East. Lavender, however, was apparently just as prejudiced against the Jesuits as he was against the Jews, and the former are said to have bought up every copy of his book that they could lay hands on, owing to the uncharitable references to the members of their order found in its pages.

We are informed by this author that among the Turkish Jews, " If a man die without children the next brother taketh his wife . . . and they still marry in their owne kindred. Many of them are rich Merchants, some of them are Drogomen, and some Brokers. Most of them are very crafty and deceitfull people. They

have no beggars amongst them, but many theeves, and some who steale for necessity, because they dare not begge. . . . The Jewes Sabath is on Saturday, which they observe so strictly, that they will not travell upon any occasion on that day, nor receive money, nor handle a pen to write, (as I have knowne by experience in a Doctor of Physicks) but on the morrow he would take double fees of his Patient . . . their *Cakams* and *Cohens* preach in the Spanish tongue. All matters of controversie betwixt themselves are brought before their *Cakam* to decide, who is their chiefe Church-man. *Cakam* in Hebrue is as much as *Sapiens* in Latine, that is, a Priest. Most of the Jewes can read Hebrue, but few of them speake it, except it be in two places in Turkey, and that is at Salonica, formerly called Thessalonica, a Citie in Macedonia by the gulf Theraicas; and at Safetta in the Holy Land, neere unto the sea of Galale: Which two places are as it were Universities or Schooles of learning amongst them, and there (*honoris gratis*) they speake Hebrue. . . ." Sandys, in remarking on the frequent fires in Constantinople, observes that the *Aga* and his *Janizaries* "not seldome . . . themselves set the Jews' houses on fire who made wary by the example, are now furnished of arched vaults for the safe-guard of their goods which are not to be violated by the flame". He estimated that the Jews formed one-fourth of the total

population of Constantinople which amounted to 700,000, but remarked that none of these 175,000 Jews lived in Pera, although they had their shops there. He goes on to observe, " We omit to speak of the Jews, until we come into Jewry ", but evidently he never got there, for we hear very little more about the Jews of Constantinople from this author, although he gives some information respecting those of the Holy Land. He mentions, however, that the Turks have a habit " of baptizing of their wines ; which is the reason that the Jews will not drink thereof ".

A very curious though biassed account of the Turkish Jews in the first half of the seventeenth century is afforded by a perusal of *A Voyage into the Levant . . . with particular observations concerning the modern Condition of the Turks, and other People under that Empire*".[1] The author, Henry Blount, was a gentleman of birth and education, and after his return from the Levant was appointed a gentleman-pensioner to King Charles I who knighted him in the year 1639. He had wit and tact enough to avoid getting into trouble with the Roundheads, and lived to the age of eighty. Blount asserts that one of his principal incentives in engaging in his voyage to the Levant was the desire to observe the customs of the Jews, but he appears to have been

[1] Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant : A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. i : OSBORNE.

greatly prejudiced against them *ab initio*, as he stigmatizes them as " a race from all others so averse both in nature and institution, as glorying to single itself out of the rest of mankind, remains obstinate, contemptible and infamous ". He admits that the modern condition of the Jews " is more condemned than understood by Christian writers ", but he argues that the change of their pursuits from agriculturists and shepherds had debauched " their old innocence, and turned them to what they now are, merchants, brokers, and cheaters ". " Their religion ", he asserts, " renders them more generally odious than any one sort of men " and places them in a position of opposition to all mankind, by means of which " they become better studied, and practised in malice and knavery, than other men ". A traveller imbued with such prejudices could not have found it difficult to find subjects of reprobation among the Jews of Turkey and a considerable part of the narrative is therefore not surprisingly devoted to the abuse of the Jews, wherever they may have settled. There is a somewhat entertaining account of synagogue services in Turkey which may throw some light on the customs of those days. " In their divine service, they make one of the best sort read a chapter of Moses, then some boy or rascal reads a piece of the prophets ; in the middle of the Synagogue is a round place vaulted over,

supported by pillars, therein sometimes one of their doctors walks up and down, and, in Portuguese, exalts the Messiah, comforts their captivity, and rails at Christ. They have a cupboard made to represent the tabernacle, wherein they lay up the tables of the law, which now and then they take forth and kiss: they sing many tunes, but frequently that of Adonai, which is the ordinary name of God; for Jehovah they mention not but upon high occasions. At circumcision, boys are set to yaul out David's psalms so loud as dins the infant's cry. The Synagogue is hung round with glass lamps burning; every man at his entrance puts on a linnen cope, first kissing it; but else they use no manner of reverence or sign of devotion. . . ."

A Capuchin monk, named Michel Febre, who was domiciled in Turkey for eighteen years in the middle of the seventeenth century, states that a line of demarcation was made between the Jews who were "natives or original inhabitants of the country, and strangers, so called because their ancestors came from Spain and Portugal". The so-called "natives", he observes, wore coloured turbans like the Christians, and the only difference between the dress of the members of the two religions was that while the Jews wore black or violet shoes, the Christians used red or yellow ones. The Spanish and Portuguese Jews wore a peculiar head-dress "like a brimless Spanish hat". The two

sections of the community had separate cemeteries and synagogues. All kinds of professions and employments were pursued by the Jewish inhabitants, the higher classes engaged in banking, while others were employed as money-lenders, money-changers, agents and traders of every description, and as doctors, chemists, and interpreters. " They are so skilful and industrious ", says the good old monk, " that they make themselves useful to everyone ; and there will not be found any family of importance among the Turks and the foreign merchants, which has not in its employ a Jew, either to estimate Merchandise and to judge of its value, to act as interpreter, or to give advice on everything that takes place ". Jews were not permitted to wear anything coloured green, as, this colour having been the favourite one of Mohammed, its use was restricted to his followers. In fact Thevenot says " if a Christian or Jew be found with the least bit of Green about him, he'll be soundly bastinado'd, and pay Money to boot ". The Jews had to pay " the yearly Karadge ", which is a tribute of four piastres and a half a head. They began to pay this tribute when they were nine years of age, the rabbis and the women, however, being exempt.

Thevenot was evidently not so friendly disposed to the Jews as Febre, and he writes about them in an exceedingly disparaging manner. He remarks " as to

their Manners, they are the same in all places, that is to say, as great cheats in *Turkie*, as in Italy ; and their thoughts run upon nothing else but devising and finding out taxes and tricks to vex Christians or Turks ". No doubt the old traveller had suffered from some impost devised by a Jewish financial agent and was in a thoroughly bad temper with the latter's co-religionists in consequence. He states that the Jews could dress like the Turks with the exception that they must not wear anything coloured green, " nor a white Turban, nor red vests ". As a rule they wore violet coloured garments, which colour was compulsory with regard to their headgear.

Many of the older writers mention the Jewish puppet plays of Turkey and the East. Indeed, Thevenot remarks, " I never saw any but them play ". Dr Israel Abrahams observes, that " In 1648 the Sultan Ibrahim utilized the services of Jewish fiddlers and dancers, while in the reign of Mahomet IV (1675) at a royal banquet in Adrianople, Jewish dancers and mimics passed from tent to tent, performing tricks ".[1]

Notes on Chapters I and II

(From J(ohn) E(velyn)'s *The History of the Three Late Famous Impostors*, 16mo, 1669.)

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[1] *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages.*

Turkey

I. *Declaration to all the Nation of the Jewes*, published by Sabbathai Zevi. Written originally in Hebrew, translated into Italian, and re-translated into English.

" The onely, and First-borne Son of God, Sabatai Sevi, the Messiah and Saviour of Israel, to all the Sons of Israel, peace. Since that you are made worthy to see that great Day of Deliverance, and Salvation unto Israel, and Accomplishment of the Word of God, Promised by his Prophets, and our fore-fathers, and by his Beloved Son of Israel: let your bitter sorrowes be turned into Joy, and your Fasts into Festivals, for you shall weep no more, O my sons of Israel, for God having given you this unspeakable Comfort, rejoyce with Drums, Organs, and Musick, giving thanks to him for performing his Promise from all Ages; doing that every day, which is usual for you to do upon the New-Moons; and, that Day Dedicated to affliction and sorrow convert you into a Day of Mirth for my appearance: and fear you nothing, for you shall have Dominion over the Nations, and not onely over those who are on Earth, but over those Creatures also which are in the depth of the Sea. All which is for your Consolation and Rejoycing.

" SABATAI SEVI ".

II. List of the " Princes which were to govern the Israelites in their march towards the Holy-Land, and

to dispence Judgement and Justice after their Restoration ".

" Isaac Silvera	King David.
Salomon Lagnado	was Salomon
Salom Lagnado Jun.	named Zovah.
Joseph Cohen	Uzziah.
Moses Galente	Josaphat.
Daniel Pinto	Hilkiah.
Abraham Scandale	Jotham.
Mokiah Gaspar	Zedekiah.
Abraham Leon	Achas.
Ephraim Arditi	Joram.
Salom Carmona	Achab.
Matassia Aschenesi	Asa.
Meir Alcaira	Rehoboam.
Jacob Loxas	Ammon.
Mordecai Jesserun	Jehoachim.
Chaim Inegna	Jeroboam.
Joseph Scavillo	Abia.
Conor Nehemias	was Zarobabel.
Joseph del Caire	named Joas.
Elcukin Schavit	Amasia.
Abraham Rubio	Josiah.

" Elias Sevi had the title of the King of the king of kings.

" Elias Azar his Vice-king, or Vizier.

" Joseph Sevi, the king of the kings of Judah.

" Joseph Inernuch his vice-king ".

III. *A new method of worship for the Jews*, published in Smyrna, by Sabbathai Zevi.

" Brethren, and my People, men of Religion, inhabiting the City of Smyrna the renowned, where live men, and women, and families ; Peace be unto you from the Lord of Peace, and from me his beloved son, King Salomon. I command you that the ninth day of the Moneth of Ab (which according to our account answered that year to the Moneth of June) next to come, you make a day of Invitation, and of great Joy, celebrating it with choice meats and pleasing drinks, with many Candles and Lamps, with Musick and Songs, because it is the day of the Birth of Sabatai Sevi, the high King above all kings of the Earth. And as to matters of labour, and other things of like nature, do, as becomes you, upon a day of Festival, adorned with your finest garments. As to your Prayers, let the same order be used as upon Festivals. To converse with Christians on that day is unlawful though your Discourse be of matters indifferent, all labour is forbidden, but to sound instruments is lawful. This shall be the method and substance of your Prayers on this day of Festival : After you have said, Blessed be thou, O holy God ! then proceed and say, Thou hast chosen us before all people, and hast loved us, and hast been delighted with us, and hast humbled us more

than all other Nations, and hast sanctified us with thy Precepts, and hast brought us near to thy service, and the service of our King. Thy holy, great, and terrible Name thou hast published amongst us: and hast given us, O Lord God, according to thy love, time of Joy, of Festivals, and times of Mirth, and this day of Consolation for a solemn Convocation of Holiness, for the Birth of our King the Messiah, Sabatai Sevi thy servant, and firstborn son in love, through whom we commemorate our coming out of Egypt. And then you shall read for your Lesson the 1, 2, and 3 Chapters of Deut. to the 17 verse, appointing for the reading thereof five men, in a perfect and uncorrupted Bible, adding thereunto the Blessings of the Morning, as are prescribed for days of Festival: and for the Lesson out of the Prophets usually read in the Synagogue every Sabbath: you shall read the 31 Chapt. of Jeremiah. To your Prayer called Mussaf (used in the Synagogue every Sabbath and Solemn Festival) you shall adjoyn that of the present Festival; In stead of the sacrifice of Addition, of the returning of the Bible to its place, you shall read with an Audible Voice, Clear Sound, the Psalm 95. And at the first Praises in the Morning, after you have Sang Psalm 91, and just before you sing Psalm 98, you shall repeat Psalm 132 but in the last Verse, where it is said: As for his Enemies I shall cloath them with shame, but upon himself shall his

Crown flourish ; in the place of (upon himself) you shall read : upon the most high : after which shall follow the 126th Psalm, and then the 113th to the 119th.

" At the Consecration of the Wine upon the Vigil, or Even, you shall make mention of the Feast of Consolation, which is the day of the Birth of our King the Messiah Sabatai Sevi thy Servant, and First-born Son, giving the Blessing as followeth : Blessed be thou our God, King of the World, who hast made us to live, and hast maintain'd us, and hast kept us alive unto this time. Upon the Eve of this day you shall Read also the 81st Psalm, as also the 132nd and 126th Psalms, which are appointed for the Morning Praises. And this day shall be unto you for a Remembrance of a Solemn Day unto eternal ages, and a perpetual testimony between me, and the Sons of Israel ".

IV. Letter signed by Rabbis of Constantinople directing that the new ordinances and Prayers instituted by Sabbathai Zevi, be discontinued under pain of excommunication.

" To you who have the power of Priesthood, and are the knowing, learned, and magnanimous Governours and Princes, residing in the Citie of Smyrna, may the Almighty God protect you, Amen : for so is his will.

" These our Letters, which we send in the midst of your habitations, are upon occasion of certain rumors

and tumults come to our ears from that Citie of your Holiness. For there is a sort of men amongst you, who fortifie themselves in their error, and say, let such a one our King, live, and bless him in their publique Synagogues every Sabbath day: And also adjoyn Psalms and Hymns, invented by that man, for certain days, with Rules and Methods for Prayer, which ought not to be done, and yet they will still remain obstinate therein; and now behold it is known unto you, how many swelling Waters have passed over our Souls, for his sake, for had it not been for the Mercies of God, which are without end, and the merits of our forefathers, which have assisted us; the foot of Israel had been razed out by their enemies. And yet you continue obstinate in things which do not help, but rather do mischief, which God avert. Turn you therefore, for this is not the true way, but restore the Crown to the ancient custom and use of your forefathers, and the law, and from thence do not move; We command you that with your authoritie, under pain of Excommunication, and other penalties, that all those Ordinances and Prayers, as well those delivered by the mouth of that man, as those which he enjoyned by the mouth of others, be all abolished and made void, and to be found no more, and that they never enter more into your hearts, but judge according to the antient commandment of your Forefathers, repeating the same

Lessons and Prayers every sabbath, as hath been accustomary, as also Collects for Kings, Potentates, and annointed, &c., And bless the King, Sultan Mahomet, for in his days hath great Salvation been wrought for Israel, and become not Rebels to his Kingdom, which God forbid. For after all this, which is past, the least motion will be a cause of jealousie, and you will bring ruine upon your own persons, and upon all which is near and dear to you, wherefore abstain from the thoughts of this man, and let not so much as his name proceed out of your mouths. For know, if you will not obey us herein, which will be known, who, and what those men are, who refuse to conform unto us, we are resolved to prosecute them, as our duty is. He that doth hear, and obey us, may the Blessing of God rest upon him. These are the words of those who seek your Peace and Good, having in Constantinople, on Sunday the fifth of the Moneth Sevat, underwrot their names.

" JOAM TOB SON OF CHANANIAH BEN-JACAR.

ISAAC ALNACAGNA.	ELIEZER CASTIE.
JOSEPH KAZABI.	ELIEZER GHERSON.
MANASSEH BARNDO.	JOSEPH ACCOHEN.
KALIB SON OF SAMUEL.	ELIEZER ALÜFF ".

CHAPTER III

PALESTINE

The Promised Land—Ten Centuries of Jewish Rule—The Roman Occupation—Jerusalem under the Arabs—The Turkish Conquest—Safed—Four Englishmen and a Preacher—Vital and Lurya—Seventeenth-Century Troubles.

PALESTINE, the "Promised Land" of the Jewish Race and the scene of nearly all that is looked upon as holy in the earliest history of the Jewish and Christian religions, came into the possession of the descendants of Abraham about fourteen hundred and fifty years before the Christian Era. Moses, the great chief of the Jews, was dead, and the task and privilege of leading his people into Canaan, and of clearing the country of its former inhabitants, was left to Joshua, whose rule was willingly accepted by the people at large. The command utterly to exterminate the aborigines of the land was not carried out literally, and certain of the native races survived, though in greatly diminished numbers. Many of the later misfortunes of the Jews were attributed by the prophets to the lax manner with which the injunction to destroy the tribes was carried

out. Probably, while *in theory*, it was thought right to eliminate worthless races in those days, *in practice*, difficulties similar to those that would prevent the accomplishment of such a task in the present century, no matter how desirable that project may appear, arose. The area of the conquered region was very small in comparison with the great states to which the world became accustomed in later periods. It included the country between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, and also the land immediately to the east of the Jordan—in all, something approaching to ten thousand square miles. But it must be admitted that no area of so limited a dimension has taken so important a place in the history of the globe, or has had so much influence over much that has been concerned with the destinies of so many of its inhabitants.

The history of the Jews in Palestine for about a thousand years after the conquest of Canaan, is more or less set forth in the Old Testament, the New Testament account dealing mainly with the Herodian period. Josephus takes up the narrative—after a detailed history of the Biblical Era—and brings it down to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the events immediately subsequent to that disaster. About sixty years after the Holy City was destroyed, the Emperor Hadrian rebuilt it—in part—but

" heathen Colonists were introduced, and the Jews were prohibited from entering—a decree of Hadrian which was in force certainly up to the time of Eusebius, 312 C.E."[1] This edict was renewed in 629 A.D., after peace had been established with the Persians, who had attacked the City in 514 A.D.[2] The Roman occupation, in its various phases, extended over a period of more than seven centuries, but in the year 637 (other authorities say 655) A.D., the Arabs under the Caliph Omar took possession of the country, and Palestine, for the first time, was brought under the power of the Moslems. Under the Arab domination, the Jews at first increased in numbers and enjoyed some prosperity, but trouble soon came to them in the shape of war between the Arabs and the Seljuk Turks, followed by the Wars of the Crusades, during which hostilities Jerusalem changed hands two or three times. Few Jews appear to have remained in Jerusalem during the twelfth century, and these were evidently in much distress at the time of the capture of the City by Saladin. During the next century, the town again changed owners several times, as in 1229, when it came into the hands of the Germans, although ten years later the Moslems retook it. In 1243, the Christians once more captured Jerusalem, but they only held it for three years, when the Arabs took

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 128. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

possession of it once again. These constant changes of ownership made the Holy City a most undesirable place of residence, and when the famous Rabbi Nachmanides visited Jerusalem in 1267, he found only two Jews residing there. Later, however, the Jewish population increased, and Ashkenazi [1] and Sephardi [2] refugees came in numbers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Arab Domination of Palestine was brought to a close when Selim I, Sultan of Turkey, captured Syria, in the year 1516, and the Holy Land came under the power of the Empire which held undisputed possession of the territory for almost exactly four hundred years.

There can be little doubt that the position of the Jews of Palestine was considerably improved by the advent of the more settled conditions established by Selim and his successors. Soon after the conquest of the country, a well-known Egyptian Jew, Isaac Cohen Sholal, settled in Jerusalem. He had formerly held the important post of Nagid [3] of Cairo, but when the Sultan saw fit to abolish the office, he decided to retire to the Holy City and endeavour to improve the condition of his co-religionists in Palestine generally, and in Jerusalem in particular. Sholal appears to have

[1] [Jews from Northern and Central Europe employing the Ashkenazi or German ritual.] [2] [Jews from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, especially from Spain and Portugal, using the Sephardi or Spanish ritual.] [3] The officially recognized head of the Jews of Egypt. The office was instituted in the tenth century.

been successful in raising the tone of the Jewish community and in effecting many valuable and important reforms. He spent his money liberally, and founded many communal institutions which induced Jews to flock to the Holy City from many parts.

At a later date (circa 1527) Sultan Solyman rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and established new waterworks for the city. Under his authority the " Tower of David " was restored and the town began to assume a greater importance than had characterized it in previous centuries. Many authorities testify to the improvements carried out in Jerusalem at this period. The " Yeshibots " (religious schools) of Rabbi Sholal had had the effect of bringing many scholars to Jerusalem, mostly of Sephardi stock, although the Ashkenazim had by now begun to put in an appearance.

The refugees from Spain and Portugal had by now almost repopulated Palestine with Jewish immigrants whose superior education and, in some cases, considerable financial resources, had greatly raised the general status of the Jewish inhabitants, while the practise of the Jewish religion, with all its rites and customs, was as scrupulously carried out by the new arrivals as it had been by the native Israelites. We are informed, that " Morality was greatly benefited by the immigrants. . . . The members of the Community were no longer harassed to death . . . by a rapacious,

tyrannical and treacherous faction. . . . There was indeed a show of excessive piety, but it no longer contrasted with a revoltingly immoral mode of life ".[1] The real improvement, so noticeable in Jerusalem in the sixteenth century, was also partly due to the benefits conferred on the Jewish residents by Obadiah di Bertinoro who came to the Holy Land from Italy at the close of the fifteenth century and by his judicious and vigorous activities, remodelled the social life of the community, which, in spite of occasional trouble with the authorities, still increased in numbers and general prosperity.

Damascus, perhaps the oldest town in the world, also began to feel the influence of the colonies of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, whose arrival in the ancient " half-Palestinian capital of Syria," brought an invigorated life, as well as wealthier inhabitants, to the somewhat soporific city.

During part of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Safed, or Sappheta, had a larger Jewish population than Jerusalem, its importance having been considerably increased by the influence and sagacity of a Spanish refugee named Sargossi, who appears to have been made Chief Rabbi about the end of the fifteenth century. One of his most renowned successors was the famous Joseph Caro, who, being appointed circa

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iv, p. 397.

1541, remained in office till the year 1575, and probably exercised a greater influence over Jewish life and religion than any member of the faith since the days of Maimonides. At this period, Safed was a very flourishing town, to all intents and purposes inhabited by Jews only; it had a celebrated Jewish College, nearly all the Rabbis of which, as well as the principal notables of the town, were imbued with Cabbalistic principles and theories. Among these was the then widely known Isaac Lurya (Levi), a native of Jerusalem, who exercised a remarkable influence over the school of Jewish Mystics domiciled in the city, and who led the way to those Messianic hopes and beliefs which had such significant results in the seventeenth century.[1]

At the commencement of the fifteenth century, Safed had a population of about 10,000 Jews, and a century later, when George Sandys (son of an Elizabethan Archbishop of York) visited the town, it was described by him as the principal city of Palestine, "in which there abide a number of Jews who affect the place, in that Jacob had his being there-about before his going down to Ægypt".[2] It is not quite clear why Sandys speaks of the town as "Saffet, which was Tyberias", as the latter place is situated on the Lake of Galilee, some distance to the south. William Biddulph, one of the "Foure Englishmen and a Preacher" (whose book

[1] Graetz, vol. iv, p. 622, ch. i. [2] Sandys' *Travailes.*

of travels was edited by Theophilus Lavender) writing in the year 1601, mentions both Tiberias and "Saphetta". Of the latter he remarks, "We saw Saphetta . . . a Universitie of the Jewes, where they speak Hebrew, and have their Synagogue there. The City Saphetta is situated on a very high hill with three tops, and so the City hath three parts: one part is inhabited by Jewes, the other two by Turkes".[1] Evidently, by this time, a large and recently settled Turkish population must have been established in the town, as only thirty years previously, as we are told on the authority of Graetz,[2] when Lurya arrived in Safed, it was "a flourishing city inhabited *only* by Jews". Jost states that Tiberias was rebuilt and newly colonized in 1560, but says nothing about Joseph Nasi's connection with these events, although he tells us something regarding the Jewish College established in the town by the Sephardi Community.[3] He also alludes to the growing importance of the Jewish College at Safed, which appears to have been so firmly established by them that even an outbreak of the plague did not seriously interfere with its progress.

The second half of the sixteenth century in Palestine, as well as in other parts of the Turkish Empire, was greatly influenced by the ascendancy and power of

[1] *The Travels of Foure English Men.* [2] *History of the Jews*, vol. iv, p. 593. [3] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten.*

Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos,[1] and the Jews in Turkey " rose with and by him to a free and honorable station, the envy of their despised and less numerous brethren in Christian Europe ". His influence was such, that it is said that even the renowned Joseph Caro, at the head of the Rabbinical College of Safed, excommunicated a political intriguer named David or Daud, who had endeavoured to ruin the Jewish Duke, and Graetz asserts that the religious ban was imposed without the authorities " having convinced themselves of Daud's innocence or guilt ".

The greater part of the first quarter of the seventeenth century was a somewhat uneventful period for the Jewish population of Jerusalem and Palestine, but the peaceful spell was rudely broken by the appointment as governor of Jerusalem of Ibn Farukh, who, during his two years of misgovernment, almost ruined the Jews by his extortions and cruelties.[2] At this period the Cabbalist Vital resided in Jerusalem, and following in the footsteps of his master, Lurya, spread far and wide his Messianic ideas, gradually, if unwittingly, preparing the way for the advent of the most important of the pseudo-Messiahs of this period, Sabbathai Zevi. " The year 1666 was designated by these enthusiasts as the Messianic year, which was to bring renewed splendour to the Jews and see their

[1] *See* Chapter I. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 135.

return to Jerusalem ".[1] At this period, the Jews of Jerusalem appear to have somewhat diminished in numbers, while their circumstances in life were different from what they had been in the halcyon days of the sixteenth century. Owing to the persecutions of the Turkish officials, the best men in the community had emigrated, and " there were at that time very few men of repute and authority in Jerusalem ". In such circumstances, the hope of a return to their previous prosperity was ever present, and it was not difficult for a man with Sabbathai Zevi's powers to gain sanguine and optimistic disciples, and he gradually gathered round him a circle of adherents who had blind faith in him. He was chosen to proceed to Cairo to obtain funds from Raphael Joseph, a wealthy Jew of that city, to satisfy the demands of a Turkish official, and obtaining the necessary sum, returned with it to Jerusalem, accompanied by his third wife, whom he had married while at Cairo. But the Rabbis of Jerusalem did not support Sabbathai, or believe in his claims to be the Messiah, and their opposition to him increasing, he left the city, never to return to it. His further history lies outside of Palestine.

During the latter part of the seventeenth century, the Jewish community in Jerusalem suffered numerically and financially, and the appeals for help sent to

[1] Graetz, vol. v, p. 120.

Poland and other parts of Europe, whence assistance had been invited earlier in the century, became more frequent in occurrence and more urgent in character. The Jewish congregations in the town got deeply into debt, owing no doubt, in part, to the exactions of the authorities on a community already weakened and impoverished by the loss of its wealthier individuals and the attenuated number of its members. The century closed in gloom, with every prediction of future misfortunes, a presage which unfortunately was confirmed in the earlier days of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER IV

PALESTINE (*continued*)

The Jews in Jerusalem—"Apparent Truthes"—Sandys' *Travailes*—The Syrian Tripoli—The Valley of Jehosaphat—David Reubeni—Darker Days in Palestine—Borrowers Instead of Lenders.

THAT quaint historian, Basnage, remarks that "one would think, that the greatest number of Jews, were to be found in Judea; and yet we deceive ourselves if we seek for 'em there. Their Passion for the *Holy Land* is wonderfully cool'd since it no longer flows with Milk and Honey for them". Nevertheless, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was a great influx of Jews into the country of their ancestors, although the travellers of the period do not always seem to agree in their statements respecting the numbers of Jewish population. As a matter of fact, the curious black letter pamphlet signed Gulielmus Biddulphus and dated April 7th, 1601, asserts that the aforesaid William Biddulph did not see "one Jew in all Jerusalem for they are so hateful to the Christians there, that they seldome come hither". The statement is in the chapter headed

"Apparent Truthes" and must have been more *apparent* than *real*, but the insinuation is repeated elsewhere in the work, as it is observed that the Jews "dare not come to Jerusalem for feare lest the Christians there dwelling stone them".[1] It will be remarked, however, that Biddulph mentions only Christian hostility: nothing is said about aggression on the part of the Moslem population.

Basnage, writing a century later, says that the Jews were "more numerous and more kindly treated at *Sapheta*, than in all the rest of the Ottoman Empire" and in this statement he is confirmed by other writers. He quotes the traveller Stochove as remarking that at the beginning of the last century (1600) "this city was Peopled with nothing but Jews". The Academy appears to have been founded during the thirteenth century, as Benjamin of Tudela does not mention it, and it has been asserted that it took the place of the Academy of Tiberias to which it succeeded, but in all probability the two institutions were existent at the same period, although the Safed College outlived that of Tiberias.

Sandys asserts that the Jews in Palestine inherited

[1] *The Travels of Foure Englishe Men and a preacher into Africa, Asia, Troy, Cythiria, Thracia and to the Blacke Sea. . . . Begunne in* 1600, *and by some of them finished the yeere* 1611. [This is a later edition of *The Travels of certaine Englishmen into Africa*, etc., which was published in 1609. Biddulph was the "preacher". Parts of his letters from Aleppo and Jerusalem were published separately in 1625.]

" no part of the land, but in their own countrey doe live as Aliens. . . . In general, they are worldly wise, and thrive wheresoever they set footing. The Turk imployes them in receipt of customes, which they by their policies have inhanced ; and in buying and selling with the Christian ". He observes that the Jews " are men of indifferent statures, and the best complexions . . . their familiar speech is Spanish, yet few of them are ignorant in the Hebrew, Turkish, Moresco, vulgar Greek, and Italian languages ". A very curious account of the synagogues, the services therein, and the congregants is afforded by this author. He states that there were three kinds of Jews in the Holy Land, and of these, the Samaritans, were not Jews by descent, but lived in Damascus, making a yearly pilgrimage to " Sichem " (Schechem or Nablous). Then there were the Jews who restricted themselves to the ordinances and beliefs of the Old Testament ; while the " third sort mingle the same with traditions, and fantasticall fables devised by their Talmud ". We are informed that the synagogues " are neither fair without nor adorned within ", and the service is read in " savage tones ", while the worshippers " sing in tunes that have no affinity with musicke ". Their garments resemble those of the Turks, but are purple in colour, the gowns having large wide sleeves, clasped beneath the chin, without band or collar. They wear high brimless caps

of purple over shaven heads. With regard to the women, " the elder mabble their heads in linnen, with the knots hanging down behind. Others do wear long quilted wastecoats, with breeches underneath, in winter of cloth, in summer of linnen, and over all when they stir abroad, loose gowns of purple, flowing from the shoulders ". It is stated that the Jewish women were skilled in various kinds of needlework besides being able to do most of the things ordinarily done by women in Turkey.

Father Jerom Dandini was sent specially by the Pope to report on the position of the Maronite sect, " living in Mount Libanus in Syria ", and in the course of his travels he visited Tripoli of Syria, which is not to be confounded with the North African Tripoli, or its port of the same name, recently occupied by the Italians.[1] The good father does not appear to have been very partial to the Jews, for when his project was " divulged at Venice ", and it became " known by fifty-four Jews ", he remarks that that was " as much as to say " by " so many spies, sworn enemies to Christians ". However, nothing very terrible appears to have happened, in spite of the leakage. Dandini changed his Jesuit attire into that of a pilgrim, called

[1] *Missione Apostolicae al Patriarca e Maroniti del Monte Libano del P. G. Dandini e sua Pellegrinazione a Gierusalemme*, p. 234. Neri : Cesana, 1656. 4to. A French translation was published in 1675, and an English one in 1698.

himself Bucy, and sailed on another ship, and he seems to have carried out his plans without any obstacles being put in his way by Jews, Turks, or Gentiles.

At the time of his visit, Tripoli had a population of " at least five hundred Jews, for the most part Spanish and Portuguese, crafty in the way of trade, always ready to cheat the Christians. . . . They have no other church here but a little chapel, which is in one of their houses, and for the most part have no priest to officiate therein. . . . The Jews have ordinarily a red bonnet half a foot high, flat and round ". Formerly the Jews wore a yellow turban, and Christians, Greeks, Turks, Maronites, and Jews all wore different coloured head-gear, " but the abuse crept amongst the Jews, who began to wear such great ones, as if they seemed willing to cope in grandeur with the great Ottoman signiors, wherefore it has been so ordered, that none but Turks should wear the Turbant. The Jews, by reason hereof have discontinued it entirely ". The Reverend father makes some quaint remarks regarding the customs of the Jews in praying, comparing them with those of the Mahommedans. He observes : " As to the fashion of the Turks observe at their prayers, I believe that they have taken it from the Jews, for they wag their heads very much in the reading of the law in their synagogues, but the Mahommedans go beyond them. . . ." When the latter say " *La illah illa hou*,

There is no other God but him, you would say they are mad, so much they agitate and wag their heads from one side to another, crying as men possessed with the devil. The Jews do the same thing, when they recite the prayer or benediction *Scema, Israel*—which is *la illah* of the Turks, for they turn their heads towards the four parts of the world, to notify that God is everywhere, and Lord of the Universe. . ." It is stated that the Mohammedans prolong the singing of the last word of the above-mentioned prayer as long as they have breath to draw, while "the Jews observe the same thing at the last word of their *Scema*, this is *Had* (Chad)—*one*, for they rest sometimes a whole hour upon that word; and when they are at the last letter, they throw their heads here and there, and you would take them for mad".

Thevenot visited Palestine in the year 1658, but he says very little about the Jews. He was evidently kept so busy in visiting the various places of interest that he had little or no time to record his impressions regarding the descendants of the earlier inhabitants of the country, apart from occasional abuse of their financial methods. His guides must have been of extraordinary vigour and intelligence, as there is hardly a town, village, or puddle mentioned in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the Apocrypha which was not pointed out to this indefatigable French

traveller. Both Thevenot and Le Bruyn make mention of the cemetery of the Jews in the valley of Jehosaphat, which is stated to have been about a league in length but not very broad, and to have served as a ditch to the City of Jerusalem. It is asserted that the Community paid a Zechin a day rent for the privilege of this burial site, " which they pay out of their Common-Stock and besides this, each Person is bound to pay for his Ground. The reason why they pay so dear for their Burial, is because they believe that the last Judgement will be kept in this place, from whence they conclude that those who are interred in this place, will be judged first ".[1] Le Bruyn observed that by far the greater number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were Mohammedans, " The Jews ", he said, " resort often to settle there, especially when they are grown old, and this they do, in order to end their Days, and to be interred after their decease in the valley of Jehosophat. . . . When I left Jerusalem, about two leagues out of Town, I met several Persons who were going thither upon that design, two of which were very old, who seemed to express an earnest desire of going to end their days at Jerusalem ".[2]

Many Jewish and Gentile travellers at this period

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[1] *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant.* [2] Corneille le Bruyn, *Voyage to the Levant.*

make special mention of the Karaite Synagogue at Jerusalem, which, according to some authorities, was established by Anan ben David, the founder of the Karaite Sect. Samuel ben David, the Karaite, who visited the synagogue in the middle of the seventeenth century, states that its site was so much below the level of the adjoining streets that " it had to be reached by twenty steps ", while another writer of the same period described the synagogue as being very beautiful, and as possessing a wonderful cave under the Sanctuary. David Reubeni, the celebrated Jewish adventurer—or ambassador—visited the synagogue, as well as the cave, during his stay in Palestine in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Mr Elkan Adler has a theory that this David Reubeni was a brother of the Rajah Joseph Rabban of Cranganore, and that he was sent by the ruler of the Jewish Indian State to seek alliances in Europe. In this theory he is not supported by other Jewish writers and historians, who appear to regard David Reubeni as a political adventurer by no means " pure ", and far from " simple ". Mr Adler describes the Karaite place of worship as a " tiny little synagogue in the Karaite quarter in which one is credibly informed that they never have Minyan (a quorum for public service) ". He estimates that the " synagogue is at least two hundred years old ", but if David Reubeni visited it in the year 1523, it

must be nearly twice that age, even if the stories of its great antiquity are mere legends.[1]

Otto Fredrich van der Broben, who visited Palestine about the year 1675, stated that the Jews had to pay a tax for the building and upkeep of the Churches (? Mosques). He maintains that they offered the ruling Pacha a large sum of money if he would consent to destroy the ruins of the place in the Garden of Olives, which marks the spot where Judas is supposed to have betrayed Christ to the Roman soldiers, but he asserts that the Pacha would not agree to its destruction, because its disappearance would have displeased the Christians.

By the end of the seventeenth century many misfortunes had accumulated on the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem. On account of grave troubles much nearer home the remittances from Poland had sensibly diminished and were only forthcoming in special circumstances of urgent necessity. In the year 1690, a large number of the sect known as *Chassidim* migrated to the Holy City, accompanied by Rabbi Judah-ha-Hasid who came from Shidliz near Grodas, but who died three days after his arrival. The travellers were almost penniless and urgent appeals to Europe had to be made on their behalf. At a later

[1] *About the Indian Jews*, II: Cochin. (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 11, 1906.)

period, the local Pashas treated the Jews of Jerusalem in a most arbitrary manner. They were forbidden to deal in wine or liquors or to wear white garments on the Sabbath day. Taxes, imposts, and fines were imposed on them to such an extent that payment was well-nigh impossible out of income and had to be provided for from their diminished resources or from advances from capitalists. Their financial position was reversed; in previous centuries they had always been accustomed to lend money to their neighbours, now they had to borrow from them in order to meet the exactions of their oppressors. It is stated that they succeeded in borrowing the money for these requirements at ten per cent. for the accommodation, and if this statement is correct,[1] it cannot be urged that the lenders were usurious in their demands, considering the risk of lending money to the Jews in the prevailing circumstances.

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 137.

CHAPTER V

PERSIA

The Iran Faith—Cyrus—Ahasuerus and Esther—Shah Ishmael—Abbas the Great—A Seventy Years' Deal with Abbas—Abbas the Second—The Consequences of False Messianism.

ALTHOUGH there are legendary accounts of ancient Kings of Persia as far back as four thousand years B.C., and the first Zoroastrian monarch, priest, or prophet, is reputed to have existed at so remote a date as 2115 B.C., the more reliable history of the country can only be dated from the reign of Cyrus, who came to the throne about 559 years before the Christian Era. Some authorities suggest that the religious influence of Iran had exerted some sway over the Judaism of antiquity; others allege that the religion of the Israelites exercised some effect over those principles which characterized the primitive faith of Iran. These are, however, conjectures which it is useless to discuss, as there is no probability whatever of their solution.

When Sargon, King of Assyria, conquered, and took possession of the Kingdom of Israel (circa 721 B.C.),

he is said to have deported the King and twenty-seven thousand of his subjects to Media, while Babylonians and Syrians were brought from their homes to colonize the empty cities of Samaria. Nearly a century and a half later, Zedekiah, King of Judah, who had been placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, rebelled against that potentate, who forthwith laid siege to Jerusalem, and captured it after a long investment (587 B.C.), burning the Temple and taking many of the surviving inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea as prisoners to Babylon. The last king of Judah did " that which was evil in the sight of the Lord ", but as the same charge was made against his predecessor,[1] a child of eight years old, who only reigned for three months, it might be reasonably considered that the wickedness of the later monarchs of Judah was not the only immediate cause of the downfall of the kingdom, which, as a matter of fact, had never recovered from the previous attacks of Pekah, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar.

Half a century later, the Assyrian-Median-Babylonian monarchy having been overthrown by Cyrus, King of Persia (circa 537), the descendants of the deported Jews, together with the survivors of the captives from Judea, became subjects of the Persian conqueror. Cyrus determined, however, in the first

[1] II *Chronicles*, xxxvi, 10.

year of his reign over his new domain that he would permit and encourage the Jews to return to Palestine from all the cities in his dominions, and accounts of the episodes connected with this event are set forth at length in the Books of Ezra and of Esdras . More than forty thousand Jews returned to Palestine under Zerubbabel, their chief, who was of royal descent, but these could have formed only a small proportion of the Jews who were in Babylon, Medea, and Persia. According to the account in the fourth chapter of the book of Ezra, " the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin ", *i.e.*, the Samaritans, successfully schemed against the completion of the building of the Temple, and the erection of the walls of Jerusalem, during the latter part of the reign of Cyrus and his successors to the Persian throne, Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes, monarchs who were otherwise known under the names of Cambyses and Smerdis, the Magian.

It was not until Darius Hystaspes had been seated on the Persian throne for two years, that the schemes of the Samaritans were finally defeated, mainly through the instrumentality of the prophets Haggai and Zedekiah, and, assistance being rendered by the King to Zerubbabel and a decree to that effect promulgated, the Temple was finally completed (515 B.C.), six years after Darius came to the throne. During the reign of

that monarch the Jews enjoyed great prosperity, not alone in Persia proper, but in all the great territories under the sway of the Persian King. His son and successor, Xerxes, has been identified by many historians with King Ahasuerus, so well known in Jewish history in connection with the dramatic episodes related in the Book of Esther. This view, however, is not generally entertained, it being asserted that it was Artaxerxes I, surnamed Longimanus (who came to the throne in 464 B.C.), who married Esther six years later.

On the other hand, Milman disagrees with the theory that Artaxerxes Longimanus was the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, as he alleges that he cannot " trace the character of the mild and humane Artaxerxes Longimanus in the capricious despot, who repudiates his wife because she will not expose herself to the public gaze in a drunken festival; raises a favourite vizier to the highest honours one day, and hangs him the next; commands the massacre of a whole people, and then allows them, in self-defence, to commit a horrible carnage amongst his other subjects ". He considers that Xerxes, son of Darius Hystaspes, was a man whose weak character and headstrong violence exactly agreed with such deeds, and he maintains that that monarch made Esther his queen in the year 479 B.C.; his wife, according to Herodotus, was named " Amestris ", and

the similarity of the names is certainly significant.[1] Again, Josephus distinctly states that " after the death of Xerxes the government descended to his son Cyrus, whom the Greeks called Artaxerxes ".[2]

There is therefore considerable doubt whether Xerxes, son of Darius Hystaspes, was, or was not, the Ahasuerus of Scripture, but there appears to be no reason to doubt that he continued the protection of the Jews afforded to them by his predecessor, and that either he, or his successor—according to the theory adopted—despatched Ezra, or Esdras, to Palestine, and gave him a letter to the authorities in Syria charging them to give every assistance to the Jews, and giving Ezra full authority over his co-religionists. " This edict ", according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, " was issued in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, corresponding to 458 B.C. . . . Nor is there any ground for holding that the king in question was any other than Artaxerxes Longimanus ".[3] Nehemiah, who, it is stated in the Bible, was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes at Shushan, was despatched to Jerusalem at his own request (circa 440 B.C.), and he rebuilt the walls and instituted political and religious reforms. In this work, he collaborated with Ezra, but he incurred considerable opposition, from " wealthy landowners,

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[1] Milman, *History of the Jews.* [2] *The Works of Josephus,* book xi. [3] Vol. v, p. 321.

not themselves Israelites, but allied with leading families within the City ".[1]

The monarch to whom Nehemiah was cupbearer has been identified by De Saulcy with Artaxerxes II, whose reign began 404 B.C. If, however, this theory be correct it is difficult to understand how he could have worked together with Ezra, with whose assistance he is stated by the same authority " to have enforced or reinforced the Mosaic law, especially the provision relating to the sanctity of the Sabbath, which on his second visit he had again to emphasize ". Ezra would have been of a very great age at this time, if this theory is to be accepted.

During the period of the Persian sovereignty over Palestine, the administration of the country was only characterized by a general superintendence on the part of the Persian Government and the internal government of Jerusalem and Judea, " fell insensibly into the hands of the high priests ".[2] This state of affairs appears to have continued until the year 332 B.C., when Alexander marched against the Holy City; but he did not attack it, and visiting the temple, declared that he had had a vision of the High Priest, who had promised to deliver the Persian Empire into his hands. The great conqueror granted favourable terms to the Jews, but after his death, his vast

[1] *The Works of Josephus*, book ix, vol. ix, p. 209. [2] Milman, *History of the Jews*.

territories were divided up and Persia changed hands frequently for the next thousand years, until in the year 651 A.D., the "national power of Iran" ceased, bringing about with it "the overthrow of Zoroastrianism as the national faith of Persia. Henceforth Persia's creed became Mohammedan, and her history became marked more and more by periods of invasion, conquest, and foreign rule or misrule".[1]

During all these many centuries a large Jewish population maintained itself in the various provinces appertaining to Persia proper. In the turbulent times that prevailed, famous towns disappeared and whole provinces were destroyed and lost their identity. The Jews, however, escaped annihilation apparently by moving in periods of great danger to other centres of the Kingdom, which offered more favourable conditions. There they settled, and the process was repeated whenever an exodus again seemed an absolute necessity. The Jews, however, have never been so successful in Persia as in other states wherein they have been domiciled, although they have remained in the country—in varying numbers—from the most remote periods up to the present day.

Tamerlane, the great warrior of the East, who died early in the fifteenth century, was the cause of much misery and misfortune to the Jews during the progress

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 648.

of his brilliant campaigns, when the Jewish communities at Bagdad and other centres in Persia were annihilated—at all events for a time—by this sanguinary despot and his successors. Nevertheless, as before, the majority of the surviving Jewish inhabitants —probably from want of means to emigrate—remained in Persia, " but as their Academies had been destroyed, and the Sciences could not flourish among the Compulsions of War, their learned Men, and Heads of the Captivity, have for a long time disappeared ; and even the private Persons dispersed in the Provinces and Cities, made a sad figure there because they had been ruined ".[1]

The first of the line of the Shahs of Persia whose descendant rules the remnants of his Empire to-day was a certain Ishmael, or Ismail, who, commencing to reign in the year 1502, succeeded in conquering the kingdoms of Media and Georgia when still in his early youth. The Jews of Media were dazzled by the military feats of the Shah and endeavoured to obtain his favour, but in spite of their admiration and homage, they do not appear to have succeeded in winning the regard of their autocratic and rigorous monarch. Ismail died in 1523, and about sixty years later the famous Schak Abbas, sometimes called Abbas the Great, came to the Persian throne. This monarch,

[1] Basnage, *History of the Jews*, book vii, p. 696.

who is represented[1] as having been "a wise and prudent man, and one who exceedingly studied the Benefit of his subjects", came to the conclusion that his dominions were very thinly populated and resolved to grant substantial privileges in order to attract foreigners to settle and trade in the country. The result of this policy was that "multitudes of People arrived from the neighbouring Parts, and particularly a crowd of Jews, who drew the Trade to them and enriched themselves".[2] The jealousy of the other Persian traders being aroused, they lost little time in complaining to the Shah, and, as was usual in such cases, they represented that the Jews had succeeded by craft, extortion, avarice, and usury, and that the results of their practices would be not alone the ruin of the other traders, but the eventual depletion of the royal exchequer. It was, however, not quite so easy to withdraw the pledges of protection which had been granted to the Jews, under which they had settled in the country; other strangers had also immigrated into Persia on similar conditions, and an attack on the rights of the Jews would have been viewed with considerable suspicion and might have led to the withdrawal of the newcomers. This the Shah by no means desired.

[1] *The History of the three late Famous Impostors . . . together with the Cause of the final Extirpation, Destruction and Exile of the Jews out of the Empire of Persia.* [2] Basnage, *History of the Jews*, p. 697.

However, after much consultation with state ministers and expounders of the Mohammedan faith, it was announced that it was laid down in the Koran that if the Jews had not embraced the faith of Mohammed within six hundred years of the promulgation of that religion, they were to be immediately destroyed. The time limit had expired: the Jews had not turned Mussulmen; and they had not been destroyed. The Shah was delighted at this expedient for saving his face, and would immediately have acted on the belated edict, but his advisers counselled delay, and his vizier, who was as crafty as his master was cruel, persuaded Abbas to call together the *Chachamim* or Rabbis, and Heads of the Jews, before proceeding to destroy their disciples. The leaders being brought before the Shah, he proceeded to question them—not without a certain degree of subtlety—regarding some very moot rites of the Jewish religion, some of which (for example the sacrifices), had fallen into disuse. Then he endeavoured to trap them into some reflection on the characters of Mohammed or Christ, which he could use as generally betraying the attitude of the Jews towards the Prophet, or the Christian Saviour. The *Chachamim*, however, were particularly wary in their replies, and, declining to dispute with Abbas, reminded him that they were in his country at his own invitation, and entreated him " to have compassion on

his Slaves and subjects who had settled in his Dominions only to please him". They expressed their belief in the coming of a Messiah, but declined to admit that Christ was the expected Redeemer who was to come to Zion. Abbas now assumed great heat at their attitude to one who had been recognized by Mohammed as "The Spirit of God" (Jesus Christ), and demanded that they should definitely fix a date by which time the Messiah *they expected* should come to earth. After much deliberation, the *Chachamim* and their co-deliberators fixed on seventy years later as the computed period, as they very rightly conjectured that they would be all dead,—Shah, vizier, and *Chachamim* —when that time had elapsed, "and that in the interim such alterations might be forgotten, or averted, and that at the worst, a good summe of Money would reverse the sentence. But that something was of necessity to be promis'd to satisfie" the Shah's "present humorous zeal".[1]

Abbas accepted the era suggested as a kind of basis for fixing a pecuniary solatium for their protection during the period, and this he estimated at two millions in gold, contracting that at the end of the period, if the Messiah did not appear, the Jews were to embrace Mohammedanism or be annihilated. If, on the contrary, he did appear, Schak Abbas or his

[1] *The History of the three late Impostors.*

successor would adopt the Jewish religion. The agreement was then definitely drawn up and signed, the money was paid, and the deed placed in the Archives.[1] There are detailed accounts of this extraordinary transaction in the *History of the three late famous Impostors* . . . London, 1669; *Two Journeys to Jerusalem* . . . London, 1685; and *The History of the Jews*, by Basnage, 1708, but this historian appears somewhat incredulous.

Abbas I died in the year 1626, and was succeeded by Shah Sophi who, dying in 1642, was succeeded by Abbas II. In the twenty-first year of the latter's reign, some zealous antiquarian, poring over the records of the Royal Family, unearthed the long-forgotten agreement between Abbas I and his Jewish subjects, entered into so many years previously. It was now the year 1663, and Sabbathai Zevi, the notorious pseudo-Messiah, was beginning to be known throughout all Asiatic and North African countries. Here was the Messiah alluded to in the agreement, and if he should be substantiated, the Shah—and no doubt following him, the court, and the country—would have to embrace the Jewish religion. The period was up, and more than up, and the crisis was at hand. "Upon this", we are told, "the Sophy (Shah) instantly summons a Council, produces the Instrument

[1] Basnage, *History of the Jews*, book vii, pp. 697-698.

(the agreement) before them, and requires their advice, what was to be done; and the rather, for that there began now to be great whispers, and some letters had been written to them from Merchants out of Turkey, of the motions of a pretended Messiah, which was the famous Sabatai: This so wrought with the Emperor and his Council, that with one Voice, and without longer pause, they immediately conclude upon the destruction of the Jews, and that this wicked Generation of Impostors and Oppressors of his People were no longer to be indured upon the Earth ".[1]

The persecutions which ensued were of the most sanguinary nature, and extended throughout Persia for a period of three years, from 1663 to 1666. They have been described in verse by the Judæo-Persian poet Babai ben Lutaf, of Kashan, who, however, ascribes their immediate cause to the theft of a costly poignard belonging to the Shah, the jewels of which were said to have been sold to two Jews. It has been stated that Abbas ordered that all Jews without exception should be massacred, but his vizier persuaded him to give them the option of embracing Islam or of leaving the country empty-handed. Failing their acceptance of one of these alternatives they were to be put to death. Those who accepted apostasy were richly rewarded, and many of the poorer Jews are

[1] *The History of the three late famous Impostors.*

supposed to have adopted the Mohammedan religion. Although, in all probability, great numbers of Jews were massacred in Persia, and multitudes fled to India, Turkey, China, and other lands, it is questionable whether the country was at this time so denuded of its Jewish population as some of the writers would have us believe.

In comparing the expulsion of the Jews from Persia with the occurrences in Spain in 1492, it may be observed that, as Mr Elkan Adler says, " it is a failing with Jews to magnify disasters ". According to this author's idea, the Spanish Jews in 1492, " were like the Russian Jews to-day who live outside the pale of Jewish settlement; they were known, they were tolerated, and they were able to square the police, subject always to the periodic risk of being squeezed for gain ".[1] In all probability, something of the kind occurred in Persia, and Basnage's statement " that there remained not one single Jew in all that vast Extent of Provinces where they had heaped up mighty Riches ", is exaggerated and incorrect. Thevenot, a very keen observer, though no particular friend of the Jews, speaks frequently of them during his visit to Persia between the year 1663 and 1666—the very years of the massacre—and mentions nothing that would suggest so wholesale a holocaust as Evelyn, Basnage,

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *Auto de Fè and Jew.*

and some of the other writers allege. It seems, however, abundantly clear that the Jews were ruined politically, financially, and socially, and that those that remained in Persia led a hopeless and stunted existence, for the most part in poor and humiliating circumstances, and as far as can be gleaned from the works of modern travellers, their position had very little advanced up to the end of the nineteenth century. There is henceforth little mention of Jewish writers, politicians, diplomatists, or bankers, as the spirit of the Persian Jews seems to have been crushed by a long series of religious persecutions which appear to have rivalled the barbarities of Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

CHAPTER VI

PERSIA (*continued*)

The Origin of the Persian Jews—Legends of Ispahan—Benjamin of Tudela—Teixeiro's Visit to Persia—Thevenot's Account—Benjamin II's Persian Experiences—Sir Thomas Herbert—Sir John (Jean) Chardin—Later Miseries.

BENJAMIN II, who made a tour through Persia in the middle of the nineteenth century, affirmed that all Jews domiciled there declared "that they are descendants of the first exiles from the Kingdom of Israel. Although a small number belonging to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are to be found among them, it is still without doubt that the greater number of them are descended from the ten tribes". As a proof of this, it was remarked that they did not possess the Talmud, although they could read and pray in Hebrew, and although some of their Mullahs might have copies of the *Shulchan Oruch* or the Talmud, these books had been brought quite recently from other Jewish centres in Asia.[1] Many legends connect the establishment of the Persian capital, Ispahan, with the arrival of the captive Jews, brought from Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar nearly three

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

decades before the great conqueror, Cyrus, ascended the Persian throne. One of these traditions alleges that when the unhappy Israelites left the Holy City, they carried with them some earth and water from Jerusalem and " that wherever they went they weighed the earth and the water of the place. Arrived at Ispahan they encamped at a place which in Hebrew means ' Encamp ', and they found the earth and the water weighed the same as those they had brought from Jerusalem ". On this site—according to the myth—Ispahan was founded, and for many centuries after the town was established, the Jews prospered in it exceedingly. When Benjamin of Tudela visited the city in 1160 A.D. he found no less than 15,000 Jews there. Their Chief Rabbi held a semi-official position, the post being recognized both by the local authorities and the Government.

Pedro Teixeira's stay in Persia took place more than four centuries after Benjamin of Tudela had returned from his travels ; at the time of this visit he reported that the Jews were " free to live anywhere, there being some eight to ten thousand families of them throughout all the provinces of Persia ". In all probability, however, Teixeira overestimated the liberty and freedom enjoyed by the Jews in Persia, and he is not corroborated in this respect by contemporary authors. It is true that Abbas I invited them (in common with

other immigrants), to settle in the country,[1] but he was a bigot of the first order, and as late as the year 1624 he burnt alive Mariani (or Ketavana), a Princess of Georgia and a Christian, who would not consent to change her religion at his dictation. It is evident that the failure of the schemes of Abbas to convert his Jewish subjects was accompanied by much cruelty to them, probably before as well as after the agreement entered into between them, of which previous mention has been made. Thevenot, half a century later, speaks of the non-success which attended attempts to convert the Jews wholesale, remarking that "upon a diligent observation it was found that whatever Pretences they made to Mohammedism, they practised Judaism still. So that there was a necessity of permitting them to turn bad Jews again, since they could not be made good Mussulmans".[2] Greater success —ostensibly at least— attended more modern attempts at wholesale conversion at Shiraz, for Benjamin II states that in that city two thousand five hundred Jews, out of a total Jewish population of three thousand, "were compelled to go over to the Mussulman sect of Ali" during the twenty years that preceded his visit there. He remarks that "although outwardly apostates, a great number of these families still preserve in their hearts the faith of their fathers, and even find

[1] *See* previous chapter. [2] *The Travels of M. de Thevenot*, folio, 1686.

means of having their children circumcised in secret ". Benjamin tells a pathetic tale of his meeting with some of these Persian Marranos, which runs as follows: " One day my room became gradually filled with women all wearing white veils, who, one after another, introduced themselves to me. As the Jewish women are permitted only to wear black veils, in order to distinguish them from others, this visit disquieted me . . . they told me that all these women belonged to the families who had been compelled to embrace the faith of Islam, but who in secret adhered to the faith of their fathers. . . . I addressed some words to them on their apostasy, whereupon the women wept bitterly. One of the men present came forward and said: ' Our brethren know under what fearful circumstances we were obliged to apostatise: we did it to save ourselves from tyranny and death. We assure, however, that, notwithstanding our apparent apostasy, we still cling with all our hearts to the faith of our fathers, and this we testify by our presence here to-day; for if it were known, we should all certainly be lost! ' These words much affected me; I tried to console them. . . ." [1]

Thevenot arrived at Ispahan in 1664, at a time when the persecutions of the Jews nre stated by other authorities to have been at their height. He asserts that the Jews residing there were " beggarly poor, and

[1] *See* Note I, p. 96.

not very numerous, because there is nothing for them to be done there ", but in all probability, bad as things were with the Jews at Persia at this period, they managed to conceal a part of their possessions, and there were many more of them than appeared to casual observers. He states that they paid an annual poll tax of a sequin a head and were obliged to wear " a little square piece of stuff two or three fingers broad ", to denote their nationality. It had to be sewn to their " Caba or Gown, in the middle of their breast, about two fingers above the girdle, and it matters not what stuff that piece be of, provided that the colour be different from that of the Cloaths to which it is sewed ".

An earlier seventeenth-century traveller to Persia than Thevenot was Sir Thomas Herbert, who came to visit Ispahan after he had carefully studied Benjamin of Tudela's description of the place. He frequently quotes from Benjamin's Itinerary, describing the author as " Ben Jonas, a vagabond Jew ", although no doubt he used the word " vagabond " in its old-world sense in which it merely meant " wandering ". He evidently could find no better description of Ispahan than that of the old Jewish Rabbi, but he does not mention the Jewish inhabitants of the town at all. Sir Thomas also made a stay at a place which he calls " Jaaron ", probably the modern Jehrun and describes as " a town consisting of a thousand Jewish

families". Jehrun was on the high road to Shiraz and, as such, no doubt possessed many advantages for business with travellers. We are informed that the Jewish inhabitants (who would appear to have monopolized the City), were descended from "those foure tribes, Salmanassar son to Tyglath Pelezer, the Assyrian King forc't from Samaria Anno Mundi 3220, placing them in Hala, Hara, & Ghabor (by the River Gozan) Cities of the Medes: The towne (I do but imagine so) is named from *Jaarim* a memorable towne in Canaan: they (the Jews) have some Sinagogues, but no high priests; the Mosaicall Law they have wonderfully corrupted: they are to this day a hardhearted subtle people; very cowardly, rich, but odious to all other religions".

In the year 1628, Sir Thomas arrived at Lar, the capital of a province of the same name, which, before the Portuguese occupation, was ruled by the governor of Ormuz. Herbert stayed there nine days, and was by no means impressed by the inhabitants, who, he says, were "most part naked, and merit as naked a relation: They are a mixture of Jewes and Mahomitans: both of them a swarthy deformed generation: for generally in this city they are blear-eyed, rotten tooth'd, and mangy Leg'd: the violent heat and poysonous waters causes it".[1] Some forty years later,

[1] Thomas Herbert, *Travels into Africa & Asia . . . Persia & Industani.*

Jean Baptiste Tavernier, the French traveller, remarked of this place that " the Jews who are very numerous in this town have a quarter to themselves near the Hill on which the Castle stands. . . . They are famous for Silk Manufactures and especially for making silk girdles ".[1]

Some little information respecting the Jews of Persia in the seventeenth century can be gleaned from the works of Jean (afterwards Sir John) Chardin who started on his second journey to Persia in the year 1671. He was a well-known jeweller and diamond merchant of France, who travelled much in the East and wrote a valuable account of his journeys and of the countries which he visited. He stayed for a time in Shiraz, where he stated " the Jews in common with the other non-Islamic inhabitants enjoyed religious liberty ". There can be little doubt that the inhabitants of Lar, Jehrun, Ormuz, and even Shiraz, were subject to less cruel oppression than those who lived under the more direct rule of the Shah and his Viziers in Ispahan. Chardin resided for some time at the court of Abbas II and was present at that king's coronation. He describes the fear and misery in which the Jews of Ispahan existed, and tells us something of the efforts which had been constantly made to convert them to Islam. In Shiraz the Jews " were employed

[1] *Le Six Voyages de J. B. Tavernier*

in the manufacture of wine for European companies which had bought the privilege of wine-making", but it is somewhat significant that this account of Jews working at a trade is unaccompanied by any mention of Jewish employers of labour or of Jewish merchants with large engagements or activities such as were common in Turkey, Egypt, or Morocco at this period. Chardin says very little respecting the persecution of the Jews, which had probably partly ceased during his second visit to the country. He was soon destined to know the effects of religious oppression on his own account, as after his return to France he had to leave his native country owing to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He came to England where he was hospitably received and was eventually knighted by King Charles II.

The general evidence of historians and travellers serves to show that far less liberty and far fewer privileges were enjoyed by the Jews of Persia than by their co-religionists in most of the other countries of Asia and Africa. Their condition, with few exceptions, seems to have been one of poverty and humiliation, together with continued dread of attacks, with or without the sanction of the local authorities. There appear to have been no prominent Jews who could influence the Shahs or their Viziers, and, as far as can be ascertained, the majority of them dragged out an

unprofitable life in terror, discomfort, and degradation.

Financially the Jews of Persia were better off at the time of Benjamin II's visit, although the persecutions they endured under Fath Ali Shah (1798-1834) are represented as having been even more severe than those under Abbas II. Benjamin bitterly comments on the wretched condition of the Persian Jews at this period and he represented their position in memorials to the Sultan of Turkey, the Emperor of the French, and the Queen of England, but no substantial alleviation of their circumstances resulted, as Lord Curzon, writing as late as 1892, reported that " as soon . . . as any outburst of bigotry takes place in Persia . . . the Jews are apt to be the first victims ".

Notes

I. Benjamin's account of his meeting with the Persian Marranos is reminiscent of a similar occurrence related by Le Père Guy Tachard, in the *Relation of the Voyage to Siam*, on the occasion of the visit of the Jesuits to Cape Town, 1685.[1] The account is taken from a description of the incident as related in *Mendelssohn's South African Bibliography* : " It is curious to read of the secret interviews held between the Jesuits and the Catholics of the Cape Colony, who flocked to visit the Fathers in their ' little observatory '.

[1] *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam*, Tachard, 1688.

The Jesuits were not allowed to celebrate the Mass on shore, but their co-religionists came privately to see them; they were 'some of all Countries and of all Conditions, Free, Slaves, French, Germans, Portuguese, Spaniards, Flemings, and Indians. They who could not otherwise express themselves, because we understood not their language, fell upon their knees and kissed our hands. They pulled Chaplets and Medals out of their Bosoms to show that they were Catholics, they wept and smote their Breasts. That language of the heart, much more touching than words, wrought great Compassion in us. . . . We comforted them the best we could. . . '."

CHAPTER VII

INDIA

The Cranganore and Cochin Jews—Rabban's Charter—"The Jewish Territorial Organization"—The Malabar Settlements—The Genesis of the Black Jews of Cochin—The "Discovery" of the Beni Israel—David Rahabi, the Revivalist—The Fall of the Jewish State—The Cochin Jews—Other Settlements.

WHILE the Jews of Europe, from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, were living under conditions, which, for a portion of the period, were stigmatized by Milman as the "Iron Age of Judaism", and while persecutions drove the scattered race in turn out of England, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and Germany, as, well as other less important regions, their brethren in the Far East, in the lands of the predecessors of the Great Mogul and other potentates of India, were living a life of peace and plenty, far away from the bigots, the robber kings, the conversionists, the Inquisitors, and the Crusaders. How far these idyllic times went back it is difficult to ascertain; there are those who assert that there were Jews in India from the times of King Solomon, the first Jewish King to encourage traders

among his subjects and thus to develop that commercial element among the Jews which has so often imperilled the very existence of that nation. In all probability, it will never be discovered whether the Jews of Cochin or the Beni Israel, settled first in India.

The Cochin Jews possess at least three traditions regarding their origin. The first is, that they "are the descendants of the tribes carried into captivity by Shalmeneser, and who after being liberated",[1] found their way to the Malabar Coast; the second, narrates that their ancestors fled thither from Palestine after its destruction by the Romans under Titus; the third tells that in the eighth century they came from Cranganore, the Jews of which region had settled there after their flight from Persia. The historian Jost, who devoted considerable attention to the subject of the Cranganore and Cochin Jews, came to the conclusion that the early settlements at Cranganore were the result of an exodus of the Jews from Persia during the fifth century in the reign of King Kobad, who, according to some authorities came to the throne in the year 486 A.D. Jost was of the opinion that there were several batches of emigrants and from calculations that he made, he reckons that the Jews arrived in Malabar about the year 426. Benjamin II fixed the date still earlier, and asserted that a charter was

[1] Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East Indies.*

granted to the Jews in the year 379. The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, however, states that the charter was granted at a much later period, somewhere between the years 750 and 774. Whatever may be the date of the charter, it still exists, engraved on bronze or copper tablets which are at the lowest computation eleven and a half centuries old and are still in the possession of the Community of the White Jews of Cochin.[1]

The charter was granted by an Indian Prince, sometimes alluded to as the King or Perumal of Malabar, a potentate who has been called by so many different names that it is difficult to fix on one by which he can be generally recognized.[2] But whatever may have been his name and whenever he may have given the charter, all authorities agree in stating that it was granted to a certain Joseph Rabban (Isuppi Rabban) and seventy-two families that accompanied him.

The inscription on the tablets has often been translated, and three different versions of their contents appear in the notes to this section.[3] It has been stated that although "the characters are what is

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[1] *See* Note I, p. 125. [2] Oppert called him, *Sri Bhaskara Ravi Varma ;* Mr Elkan Adler left out the *Sri ;* Benjamin II gave *Sira Primal* as his name, but mentions that he was also called *Iru Bramin ;* Jost's version was *Cheron Perimul*, and Joseph Jacobs (in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*), *Cheramal Perumal.* Linschoten called him *Coningh* (*King*) *Sarama Perymal.* There are doubtless other versions. [3] *See* Notes II and III, pp. 126 and 128.

known as Vatteluth . . . written in the eighth or ninth century, they are easily legible by the Modern Student of Malayan", but it is curious to observe how very dissimilar the several translations appear to be, and, if the writing is legible, it is surprising to find so many disparities.[1] At all events, Joseph Ṛabban and his companions settled at Cranganore and also at several other places on and near the Malabar Coast, and the "Jewish Territorial Organization, or Raj"[2] founded by them, appears to have flourished until the beginning of the sixteenth century, or according to one writer, for one thousand years (as he alludes to the "tausend jährigen Bestande des Reichs").[3] Authorities differ with regard to the country from whence Rabban's expedition set forth. One held the opinion that Joseph Rabban and his companions were inhabitants of Similla, whose "community of Indo-Jewish traders . . . had become sufficiently important or influential to acquire . . . from the King or Perumal of the Malabar coast . . . a charter granting them territory. . . ." Jost asserts the expedition started from Persia; others say Yemen. A recent account of the Cochin Jews maintains that "early Jewish settlers . . . having suffered much persecution at the hands of

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, IV. (*Jewish Chronicle*, June 29, 1906.) [2] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, ii: Cochin. (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 11, 1906.) [3] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii, p. 159.

the Moors and Portuguese, a portion of them sought the protection of the Rajah of Cochin, which was readily accorded them, This was in the eighth century of the Christian era ".[1] But it is difficult to understand how the *Portuguese* could have committed any persecutions in the eighth century.[2] There may, however, possibly have been an Arab offensive which caused some of the Cranganore Jews to seek the protection of the Cochin Prince and to have thus established the Jewish colony in his dominions.

The Malabar settlements soon grew in importance, and the descendants of Rabban and the seventy-two families who accompanied him, rapidly increased in numbers and wealth. Slaves were acquired and, in addition, there was some intermingling with the natives. The dark-coloured descendants were admitted into the Jewish faith. The community was also recruited from many of the slaves, some of whom received their freedom on their adoption of Judaism, and thus the race known as the Black Jews of Cochin came into existence. There is a tradition that at some period, the date of which is obscure, the black Jews revolted against the domination of their white brethren, who, by that time, had greatly diminished in numbers.[3] They were, however, still the rulers of " the Jewish

[1] *Jewish Year Book*, London : 1911. [2] They did not arrive in India until the end of the fifteenth century. [3] *See* Note IV, p. 129.

State " for the governing classes were taken exclusively from their ranks and their influence and power enabled them to defeat the abortive rising. But the separation between the two classes of the community became still more emphasized after this revolt.

It has been asserted that " in India, caste is *varna*, which means colour, and their difference in colour has produced caste distinctions among the Indian Jews. But, although the White Jews are fair, some of them are certainly not quite white, nor are the Black Jews quite black ".[1] Similar characteristics can be observed in the various colours of mixed African races, some of the quadroons and octroons being so white that as far as their colour is concerned they cannot be distinguished from Europeans, while on the other hand occasionally a presumably pure white family is horrified and humiliated by the appearance of a dark-coloured child, doubtless descendant of some long-forgotten mixture.

The Beni Israel do not appear to have been heard of by their co-religionists before the eleventh century when they were " discovered " by a Jewish traveller from Cochin, David Rahabi, who was journeying on the West coast of India, through a strip of the country called the Konkan. In the course of his travels he was

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, ii. (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 11, 1906.)

attracted by a curious name—"Saturday Oilmen"—given to one of the agricultural communities. As a result of enquiry he ascertained that these oil pressers gained their name through a custom, peculiar to them, of resting both in their own persons and also in their cattle on Saturdays. This discovery led to further enquiries, and the conclusion at which he arrived was that he had found a community not only different from the surrounding peoples but undoubtedly of Hebrew stock.[1] Various traditions exist among the Beni Israel regarding their origin, which, however they may vary in details, all agree on two main points, viz., that their ancestors were shipwrecked on or near the West Coast of India, and that the survivors of the wreck consisted of seven men and seven women.

Benjamin of Tudela seems to have heard of the Beni Israel, though probably he never saw any of them, but Benjamin II made a long journey in order to see an ancient chronicle said to have been in the possession of a Beni Israel family in Cochin. This document is stated to have contained "the history of the tribe from the period of its banishment in the reign of Hosea (King of Israel), down to our time. For a long period this important manuscript was in the possession of the family Halagi (?Hallegua), one of the most highly respected in the country". Benjamin did not succeed

[1] Rebecca Reuben, *The Beni Israel.*

in seeing the manuscript, which he says is mentioned by Dr Jost, but he was assured by the Beni Israel that it was then still in existence. He was convinced that they were lineal descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes, and were among those carried into exile by the Assyrians. Among the reasons which convinced Benjamin in this belief was the fact that there were no Cohanim or Levites amongst them. This he explains by the theory that the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Israel had no priests of the tribe of Levi, who "did not mingle with the unruly tribes of the Kingdom of Israel".[1] Another writer points out that the absence of the *Hanuchah* festival from the Beni Israel calendar may indicate that these Jews left the country of their origin before the Maccabean period.

Mr Elkan Adler is of the opinion that the Beni Israel "originally came from Cranganore, where their ancestors may have been shipwrecked"; he does not believe that they came from Persia or from Palestine, but he thinks it possible "that their last place of origin was Aden".[2] On the other hand, a Beni Israel painter, Mr Samuel R. Samuel, who gained a prize at the Royal Academy in 1905, maintains that the community "are pure blooded Jews, the descendants of immigrants to India from the time of King

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.* [2] Elkan N. Adler, *Among the Indian Jews*, vi. (*Jewish Chronicle.*) *See* Note V, p. 130.

Solomon", and that David Rahabi instructed them in the eleventh century, in those principles of Judaism which they had forgotten in the course of their isolation from their brethren for so long a period.[1]

On the whole, there appears to be no adequate reason for doubting the traditions of the Beni Israel or the early date of Rahabi's visit. One writer, indeed, suggests that the Jewish revivalist appeared among them "not nine hundred years ago, but perhaps two hundred years ago",[2] but no reasons are given for this conflict in opinion with other authorities on the subject. Despite the statements respecting the admixture of races and colours (which have been strenuously denied) the absence of Levites and Cohens from their community appears to be a practically unanswerable argument in favour of the earlier date of settlement of the Beni Israel, although it would be desirable to trace the document referred to by Benjamin II, in order to decide on its authenticity and put the claims based on it beyond the power of future attack or contradiction.

Rahabi, it is stated, found the knowledge of Judaism still possessed by the Beni Israel much dimmed by local surroundings, the lapse of time, and the absence of communication with other Jews. "The *Shema* was

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[1] *Jewish Literary Annual*, London, 1905. [2] E. N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, iv. (*Jewish Chronicle*, June 29, 1906.)

the only bit of Hebrew they knew", and it is rather touching to learn that they repeated it "over and over again on all occasions, all festivals, all ceremonies". The old Jewish Festivals were observed in some manner or other, but "These went under Indian names, the Hebrew forms being forgotten. Thus the Day of Atonement went under a name meaning 'Fast of Door Closing", because the Beni Israel shut themselves in their houses, fasting all day, and would have nothing to do with their gentile neighbours".[1] But although much had been neglected and the old faith had been obscured, the Jewish spirit was still alive in its heathen surroundings. Rahabi set himself the task of instructing the Beni Israel in those aspects and customs of Judaism which had been forgotten. They had retained the dietary laws, circumcision, and other rites, and he now taught them public worship, according to the Sephardi ritual, and provided prayer books in their own vernacular, the Mahratti language. In all probability, Rahabi saved the Beni Israel from early assimilation. The suggestion has, however, been made that the Beni Israel are not Jews at all by descent, but were converted to Judaism by Rahabi, a theory which does not seem probable in view of their traditions. Rahabi appears to have thoroughly reformed and reorganized the Beni Israel. He founded schools,

[1] Rebecca Reuben, *The Beni Israel.*

taught them Hebrew and Judaism, made them proud of their Jewish origin, and instilled the true Jewish principles in their hearts. He trained two successors specially to carry on his work, and these, under the name of Kazis or Kajees, continued his mission and appointed successors in their turn, until their office was superseded by regular ministers or *Chazanim*, as in other Jewish communities.

In the meantime, little was heard for many centuries, outside of their own country, of the Jews in India, and, although Benjamin of Tudela mentions the black Jews of Cochin or Malabar, he says nothing of the more important, if smaller, white community. Other stray travellers speak of the Malabar Jews, and they are mentioned by Marco Polo, Vasca da Gama, Cabral, and Linschoten. Nevertheless, little or nothing was known of them in either Europe or Asia, and that little was probably regarded with considerable scepticism owing to the tales brought home about black Jews by those who had never seen or heard anything about any Jews except those who were white. The Jewish colonies in Malabar had become of some importance by the commencement of the sixteenth century, when an overwhelming misfortune brought an end to the existence of the semi-independent Jewish State. Despite disputes of some severity and even occasional outbursts of hostilities between the two sections of the

Jewish population, the community had held together for nearly a thousand years, before its existence was terminated in a tragical and final collapse. History is not altogether clear as to what occurred. Some authorities assert that the Mohammedans attacked Cranganore and drove out the Jews early in the sixteenth century, at the same time dispersing the Portuguese who had recently arrived, while others maintain that the catastrophe was brought about by a dispute which arose between Joseph Azar, the seventy-second and last prince of the Jews, and one of his brothers [1] who had taken some share in the government. In any case, the country was devastated by war, and finally the Jews were driven out of Cranganore and their other settlements. Joseph Azar and a few followers fled to Cochin, and the Jewish Kingdom was no more. Cranganore is said, at this period, to have had a population of 80,000 Jews, many of whom eventually settled in Cochin.[2]

Soon after these events the white Jews of Cochin received a substantial addition to their ranks by the influx of a number of Portuguese Jews who had fled from the Inquisition, but these were unfortunately followed by their persecutors—their Catholic countrymen.

[1] *See* Note VI, p. 130. [2] Hamilton, *An Account of the East Indies*. According to Mr Elkan Adler, the "Jewish Territorial Organization" had a population of 300,000 people, when Cranganore was destroyed in 1524, but a great portion of the inhabitants were non-Jews.

Even before the destruction of the Cranganore settlements, bands of Portuguese had harassed the Jews and caused some of them to place themselves under the protection of the Rajah of Cochin. They were well received and were granted a stretch of country where they again settled down. But their enemies gave them little rest and eventually took possession of Cochin, much to the grief of the Jews, who suffered greatly under the Portuguese domination. Some of them, however, emigrated to other settlements in India. In the year 1662, the Dutch made their first attempt to take Cochin from the Portuguese, but they failed, and had to retire for nearly a year, to renew the attack in more favourable circumstances. The Jews were suspected of assisting the invaders and Stavorinus, a Dutch admiral, thus comments on the matter: "When the Dutch made their first attempt upon Cochin, in the year 1662, the Jews secretly favoured them; but they paid dear for their interference; for the Portuguese, who soon discovered it, plundered them of almost all they had, as soon as the siege was raised; they destroyed, or attempted to destroy, their Synagogue, and everything that belonged to them: and it is worthy of observation, that when the Dutch made themselves masters of Cochin the year afterwards. . . . the Jews were reinstated".[1]

[1] John Splinter Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East Indies.*

India

Under Dutch domination, the harassed Jews again enjoyed the blessings of peace, and the communities prospered greatly under the more tolerant government of the States General. The descendants of the Portuguese Jewish settlers in the early part of the sixteenth century had done much to restore the prestige of the community of the White Jews, and, at the time of the Dutch conquest, they were under the leadership of a certain Schemto (probably Shem Tob) Castille, or Castillia, who bore the Indian official title of *Modeliaar*.[1] According to a report from Malabar in 1677, whole streets and entire villages in Cochin and in many other places on the coast and in the interior were populated with Jews. "In the year 1685 the Dutch Jews sent a commission from Amsterdam to investigate the condition of the Jews in Cochin. The report was published in 1697 under the title "Notisias por Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva".[2] Until the end of the eighteenth century the Jews of Cochin flourished and increased in numbers, but later the communities became impoverished and the congregations dwindled. The growing centres of trade in other parts of India attracted the Jews from the Malabar coast, and only a remnant of the former population of Jews remained in Cochin and in the adjacent settlements.

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[1] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii, p. 161. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vi, p. 581.

The Jews of Asia

In the year 1680, a Jewish colony was established at Surat, but the founder, Jacob Semah, and his followers soon proceeded to Bombay, where the majority of the Beni Israel settled about the close of the eighteenth century. The communities in Bombay, Calcutta, and other towns in India are all of modern date, and the only congregations which go back as far as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are those to be found in the Cochin State on the Malabar Coast.

CHAPTER VIII

INDIA (*continued*)

The Charter of the Malabar Jews—The Customs of the Beni Israel—Linschoten and the Jews of India—The Jews of Cochin—Vincent Le Blanc—Stavorinus—The Beni Israel.

THE ancient charter of the Malabar Jews is one of the most interesting of the perishable relics of Judaism after the Diaspora. "If", as Jost remarks, "the translator of the Tablets has correctly understood the meaning of the inscriptions", there is a fund of information respecting the customs of the country contained in the list of privileges granted to Joseph Rabban and his seventy-two families of followers. Whether these seventy-two households comprised the whole of the expedition, or whether they comprised merely the chief, or ruling, houses, does not clearly appear, but there can be little doubt that the charter was considered to have been of great importance, as eight kings (some authorities say six), with whom it is stated Sira Primal had divided his Kingdom, as well as Kilafis, the scribe who wrote the document, witnessed the signatures to the charter.[1] There appear to have been very definite sumptuary

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*.

laws at this period, for it is clearly laid down that Rabban, his children, and his family, had the right of wearing the expressly specified "five colours". According to Jost, the leaders wore red; their queens or princesses, yellow; their children, green; the scholars, white; and those who were in mourning, blue. Five castes of artizans were represented among the Jewish immigrants, viz., the carpenters, the braziers, the smiths, the gold-and-silver craftsmen, and the distillers of the coconut sap. This list affords valuable information respecting the occupations of the working-classes of the Jews in these days. All sorts of privileges had evidently been stipulated for and granted; there are regulations respecting the building of synagogues, and the rights of conversion, together with many minor prerogatives, while it is specially laid down that Rabban had the right of riding on a horse or an elephant, a privilege generally denied Israelites in all parts of Asia and Africa.

The tablets, locally known as the "Sasanam", are carefully preserved by the Elders of the principal synagogue in Cochin. It may be mentioned that the synagogue at Paroor (Travancore) is stated to have been built A.D. 750, and if this is correct, it was probably the first important house of worship erected under the charter granted by the Indian Prince.[1] Some of the

[1] *See* Note VII, p. 131. *Jewish Year Book*, London, 1911.

Jews must have either brought money from Persia, or made it very rapidly in Cranganore, and we are told of one philanthropist who, having given their freedom to twenty-five Jewish slaves, built a synagogue for their accommodation. These Jews resided in Cranganore, Palur (now called Paroor), Maddar or Maday Poeloetoe (probably Malla of to-day), Peri, Apatnam, and Cherigindaram, all of which towns were protected by the charter, and some of the earlier synagogues built in these towns are still in existence. While the Jews on the Malabar Coast were rapidly increasing, they appear to have been totally unaware that a thousand miles away on the Konkan coast to the north of their country, there existed a band of their co-religionists, whose memories of their ancient history were fast fading into complete oblivion, and whose religious practices had almost deteriorated into mere superstition. As previously remarked, David Rahabi, when traversing the Konkan country, found ancient survivals of social and religious customs among the Beni Israel, and was convinced by them that the tribe was of the Jewish race. After careful enquiry he communicated the news of his discovery to his co-religionists in Malabar, and from this period dates the knowledge of the existence of the Beni Israel by the world at large.

Rahabi was struck from the first by the resemblance

of many of the customs of the Beni Israel to Judaic rites. Among these were "the Nazarite vow", "the burning of frankincense", and "various domestic celebrations", which were of significant importance in view of the fact that the Beni Israel possessed no synagogues. Wishing, however, to put what he considered a practical Jewish test to them, "he gave their women some fish to cook, including some that had neither fins nor scales. These they separated from the others, saying that they never ate them. Rahabi was thereupon satisfied that they were really Jews".[1] It is strange that he appears to have been absolutely content with this simple test, as many African and Asiatic races declined then (and decline to-day) to partake of fish without scales or fins, possibly owing to the fact of the resemblance of these types of fish to snakes. "Probably their aversion to this food might be traced to the early serpent worship prevalent amongst tribes descended from nations within the Egyptian spheres of influence".[2]

The reforms instituted in the religious customs of the Beni Israel by Rahabi did not bring their practice of Judaism entirely into line with that of their orthodox co-religionists in other parts of the world. The observance of the second days of the festivals was

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iii, p. 18. [2] Mendelssohn, *Judaic or Semitic Legends and Customs amongst South African Natives*. London, 1914.

unknown, and the dietary laws were only observed in part ; some of the fasts appear to have coincided with those of the Moslem faith, although some connection with Judaic institutions was evident. In many ways, environment had considerably influenced the observances of the ancient creed, and certain customs were current which were foreign to Judaism and the laws of Moses. The use of beef, as an article of food, was avoided, in all probability in order to avert dissension with their neighbours, and many of the rites and ceremonies at births, marriages, and deaths savoured of local, rather than of Judaic, usage. " Rahabi did not have a long career as a worker amongst the Beni Israel, as he was murdered at the instigation of the African chief of Janjira, and the period of *awakening* inaugurated by him was succeeded by a period of *effort* on the part of the people themselves to come to their own ".[1]

When Benjamin of Tudela visited the Jews of the Malabar country about the year 1160, he described them " as honest people who follow the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Code, who read the Prophets, and are good Talmudists and strict observers ".[2] How far he penetrated into the " land of pepper, cinnamon, and ginger ", we do not know, but his estimate of a

[1] Rebecca Reuben, *The Beni Israel.* [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia,* vol. iii, p. 18.

thousand families as the Jewish population was probably below the mark. Jost mentions a computation which spoke of seventy or eighty thousand people, but he is careful not to bind himself to the statement, and he does not mention the period for which the figures were given. Pedro Cabral, the Portuguese traveller, who was at Cochin about the year 1500, says very little about the Jews, although he interviewed two Indian Christians who came direct from Cranganore and spoke of the mixed population of Gentiles, Christians, and Jews who thronged the town.

Nearly three-quarters of a century later the celebrated Dutch Commander, Jan Huyghen Van Linschoten, took a long voyage to what was then known as the Portuguese East Indies. He sailed down the East Coast of India, but, though he mentions the Konkan country, he does not allude to the Beni Israel, and, if he came into contact with them, he probably did not know they were Jews. He has a good deal to say about the ruler, Samara Perymal, and he gives some details respecting his career and policy. This would serve to show that the Perymal or Perumal, who flourished over a thousand years before the Dutch captain came to Cochin, must have been a very important and potent monarch, who evidently had very good reason for giving privileges to the Jews. However, Linschoten does not mention the charter and

probably did not see the tablets, but he tells us a good deal about the Jews who lived on the Malabar Coast, both in Cochin and in other places. He remarks that " they had to evacuate Cranganore (which was about ten miles from Cochin) at the time of the Portuguese occupation " ; " at present ", he observes, " they live principally at Mattancheri (South of Cochin) and Chendamangalam " ; [1] The synagogue of the latter town, built in the year 1420, is still in existence.

Linschoten says further that the " Jews are in great numbers in all places in India, as Goa, Cochin, and in the Interior ; they have partly come there from other regions, and some are descended from aboriginal Indians who, in former days, joined Jewish Communities ". The Jews of Cochin had very fine stone houses and were clever and capable merchants ; their wives were very beautiful, and, for the greater part, as white as Europeans. Many of the Jews, it is said, had come from Palestine and Jerusalem, and these spoke good Spanish, being descended from Sephardi Jews driven out of Spain in 1492. The communities mentioned by Linschoten were doubtless those established in the Kingdom of Cochin after the destruction of Cranganore, an event which so terrified the Jews on the Malabar Coast that the very site of the town was avoided by them until quite recent times. Jost

[1] *Navigatis ac itinerarium.*

mentions that the cost of the synagogue established at Cochin by the refugees from Cranganore and certain emigrants from Europe and other parts of Asia, was defrayed by four rich and distinguished men, Samuel Castillia, David Belilios, Ephraim Sallah, and Joseph Levi. In all probability this was the " Parathesi " Synagogue, which was built in the year 1568 and rebuilt in 1664. It is situated eighty yards from the Rajah's palace, and belongs to the community of " White Jews ".

Among other travellers who wrote about the Malabar Jews was Vincent Le Blanc, of Marseilles, who called at several places on the Western Coast of India. He mentions the towns of Decan and Centacola, in both of which, he says, large numbers of Jews resided and engaged in important business transactions. The Jewish women of Centacola were much praised for their beauty, and it is remarked that the Jews could be easily distinguished by their complexions, " the Moores be tawny, the Jews clearer ". The women " are held the prettiest of all the East, the fairest are Jews, and they are very chaste and strangers can only obtain to visit them, in certain assemblies of fair girles ; but they go meanly clad, contrary to the customes of all other towns : they sing certain songs like King David's Psalms, gracefully pronouncing their words, and mingling instrumental musick with their vocal ; and

thus they entertain their gallants . . . they keep their synagogues, everyone professes his Religion at liberty ".[1] Some interesting information respecting the Jews of Malabar in the latter part of the seventeenth century is afforded by Rear-Admiral John Splinter Stavorinus, in his account of his Voyages to the East Indies in the years 1775-1778. He asserts that the Jews claimed to be descendants of the Ten Tribes who were captured by Shalmaneser, and that they came to India (after their liberation from their Assyrian bonds), " where they have, from time immemorial, constituted a small, but isolated people, who have been greatly favoured by the princes of the country, and have received from them and enjoyed for a series of ages, a number of valuable privileges amongst which, the free permission to exercise their religion without restraint may not be considered as the most unimportant ". It is stated that the Jews dwell " in a separate town "— no doubt he was speaking of Cochin—" the houses of which are built of stone and are mostly plaistered white on the outside : in it are three synagogues, the chiefest and largest of which I compute to be thirty-five or forty feet in length and about one-third less in breadth ; the floor of it is laid with square tiles,[2] of blue and white Canton China ; the case, in which their copies

[1] Vincent Le Blanc, *The World Surveyed.* [2] *See* Note VIII, p. 132.

of the books of Moses are preserved, stands opposite to the entrance, and is made of very beautiful wood; in the middle of this place of worship stands the pulpit for the reader, or expounder of the law, and above it hangs a large brass branched candlestick, by which, and by the lamps which are fixed along the sides, it is lighted up in the evening. . . ."

When the Portuguese attacked the Jews of Cochin in 1662 and partially destroyed their synagogues, the scroll of the Law belonging to the synagogue of which this account is given was found to be missing. After the Jews were reinstated by the Dutch, " their Pentateuch was found by accident, or had been preserved by religious care, uninjured and entire. I was informed, by a person well versed in such matters, that their copy of the Pentateuch is a very beautiful and authentic one, and the memory of the time when it first came into their hands, has been entirely lost " Stavorinus observes that most of the Jews " are nearly as black as the native Malabars . . . yet retain, both men and women, those characteristic features which distinguish this singular people from all the other nations of the earth ". The greater part of the Jewish population was engaged in commerce, wholesale and retail. Some of them were evidently in a large way of business and bought whole cargoes of goods, and the writer mentions one noted merchant who " had drawn most of the

Cochin trade into his own hands". His readers are informed that "the town or village" inhabited by the Jews "has received the appellation of *Makwan Sieri*". It was probably a suburb of Cochin adjoining the principal quarter of the city. From these and other accounts it seems clear that at the end of the seventeenth century the Jewish communities in Malabar were extremely prosperous and that both the white and the black sections were growing in strength and wealth. "The newly arrived Dutch Jews found co-religionists of the same type as in their own country, with the Spanish prayer book, and the Synagogue service and Rites. Their congregation was conducted as in olden times, their disputes were settled by arbitration, and only in weighty matters was recourse had to the courts of the country—formerly the Dutch, and latterly the East India Co." [1]

While the Jews on the Malabar Coast were progressing, and had rapidly recovered from the disastrous calamities of Cranganore, their brethren, the Beni Israel, had by no means made commensurate strides. The lessons and example of Rahabi grew fainter, and, although his successors still taught the people, their growth, neither in material wealth nor in spiritual progress, could be considered satisfactory. At a later period many of them left their homes "as soldiers in

[1] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*.

the army of the British East India Company. . . . There was a steady migration from the Konkan in the wake of the army, and though the Konkan was still their central home, local centres were formed in different important towns of the Western Presidency, chief among them being Bombay, Poona, Ahmedabad, and Karachi ".[1]

About eight centuries after Rahabi's career, another reformer and revivalist—Samuel Divakar—rekindled the waning fires of faith among the Beni Israel. He reconstituted their practice of the religious observances, their rites, and their liturgy, and these, in their amended form, have been retained by the community and are practised according to the forms he instituted until the present day. Benjamin II states that " near Bombay, about two hours' distance from Barkout, is to be found a community of the Bene-Israel, who live according to patriarchal customs . . . they are in general wealthy, and occupy themselves in trade and agriculture. With strangers they speak the Indian language, but among themselves Tamul, in which occur many Hebrew words. . . . They had no Hebrew prayers, and with the exception of the one verse ' Schema Israel,' all their prayers were in the language of the country ".[2] One of the latest works on the

[1] Rebecca Reuben, *The Beni Israel.* [2] *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

Beni Israel asserts that this section of the Indian Jews numbers about 10,000 souls, "still principally concentrated in the Konkan". They have never, it is said, taken to commerce and no explanation of this fact has hitherto been forthcoming, "the Learned professions are now the goal of all English educated Beni Israel".[1]

One of the professions to which the Beni Israel devoted themselves in relatively large numbers was that of the army. In the forces of the East India Company entire regiments were composed of Beni Israel and many of their officers and men displayed surpassing valour, which was duly recognized, in the native wars of the earlier half of the nineteenth century. These special regiments were, however, afterwards disbanded as a part of the government's general policy, and service in mixed regiments seems to have had less attraction for the Beni Israel, whose numbers in the army subsequently diminished.

Notes

I. Translation of the Inscriptions on the Bronze Tablets of Cranganore according to the version in *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, by Benjamin II.

"In the peace of the Lord the King who created the earth according to his will! to that God, I, Iru Bramin,

[1] Rebecca Reuben, *The Beni Israel of Bombay*.

lift up my hands and swear; that God who has reigned and governed the world for so many hundred thousands of years and years. This day I am sitting on my throne at Kangnur and have reigned for 36 years after my ascending this throne. With great strength I command and with force I permit Joseph Rabban to wear five sorts of colours, to ride on an elephant and horse, and to order to make way for him when riding, to convert from the five nations that live here, to use carpets and divans as an ornament, to use flying towers, flutes, trumpets, drums with two sticks, I have permitted him and the seventy-two families all this; and also to lease lots and weights. He shall be the prince of all the provinces where these tolerated people will live and build synagogues. Without any alteration and without any reserved condition has he (the king) made this brass tablet and gave it to the Master of the five colours, Joseph Rabban, to his children, daughters, sons, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, so long as his posterity shall exist and the moon will exist. May his family long exist and be blessed by the Lord".

Witnesses to this were the eight kings, and the writer Kilafis who wrote the document.

This is the seal thereof.

II. Translation of the Inscriptions on the Bronze Tablets of Cochin, by Professor G. Oppert.[1]

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, iv. (*Jewish Chronicle*, June 29, 1906.)

A translation of the tablets in the hands of the Jews of Cochin, or rather of Professor Gustav Oppert's translation of such tablets given in his *Ueber die jüdischen Colonien in Indien*, published in the Kohut Memorial Volume (Semitic Studies, Berlin, 1897).

"Hail and Happiness! The King of Kings His Holiness Sri Rhaskara Ravi Varma who wields the sceptre in many hundred thousand places has made this decree on the day that he was pleased to dwell in Muyirikodu in the thirty-sixth year of his reign.

"We have granted unto Joseph Rabban Anjuvannan the (dignity of) Prince with all the seventy-two rights of ownership. He shall (enjoy) the revenues from female elephants and riding animals, and the income of Anjuvannan. He is entitled to be honoured by Lamps by day and to use Broadcloth and Sedan chairs and the Umbrella and the Drums of the North and Trumpets and little Drums and Gates and Garlands over the streets and Wreaths and so on. We have granted unto him the land tax and weight tax. Moreover, we have by these copper tablets sanctioned that when the houses of the city have to pay taxes to the Palace he need not pay and he shall enjoy other privileges like unto these. To Joseph Rabban, the Prince of Anjuvannan and to his descendants and to his sons and daughters, in natural succession so long as the world and moon exist Anjuvannan shall be his hereditary possession.

"So I testify—GOVARDHANA MARITANDA OF VENAD.

"So I testify—KOTAI SRIKANDA OF VENAPALINAD.

"So I testify—MANAVEPALA MANAVIYAN OF ERALANAD.

"So I testify—RAYARAN IRAVI OF VALLUVANAD.

"So I testify—KOTAI IRAVI OF NEDUMPURALY-URNAD.

"So I testify—MURKKAN SATTAN. Second Commander of the Army.

"Written by me, VAN TALAISERI KANDAN KUNRAPPOLAN, the under secretary."

III. Translation of the Inscriptions on the Bronze Tablets of Cranganore, sent to Mr Elkan N. Adler by some friends in Cochin.

"Hail Prosperity! His Majesty the glorious Bhaskara Ravi Varna whose ancestors have been wielding the sceptre for many hundred thousands of years, in the second year of our reign and the thirty-sixth year of our age, on the day on which he stayed at Mooriakote, was pleased to make the following gift. We have given to Joseph Rabban the village of Anjuvannan together with seventy-two proprietary rights, viz., the salute by firing guns, riding on animals, the revenue of Anjuvannan, the lamp of the day, a cloth spread in front to walk on, a palanquin, a parasol, kettledrums with trumpets, a gateway, a garland, decorations with festoons, the use of bows and arrows, and so forth.

We have remitted tolls and tax on balance. Moreover we have granted with these copper leaves that he need not pay the dues which the other inhabitants of the city pay to the Royal Palace, and that he may enjoy the benefits they enjoy. To Joseph Rabban the chief of Anjuvannan, to the male and female children born of him, to his nephews and to his sons-in-law who have married his daughters, we have given Anjuvannan as an hereditary estate as long as the world and moon shall exist. Hail! Thus do I know:

"KOVARTHAN MATHANDAM—Chief of Venad.

"KODAI CHIRIKANDAN—Chief of Venapalinadu.

"MANAVEPALA MANAVIYEN—Chief of Eralanadu.

"IRAYARAN CHATHAN—Chief of Valluvanadu.

"KODAI ERAVI—Chief of Nedumpuraiyoornadu.

"MOORKAN CHATHAN—Who holds the office of the sur-Commander of the Forces.

"Written by VANDALACHERI KANDAN KELAPPAN".

IV. Benjamin II observes that in the publication entitled *Mikve Israel* it is stated, "that after the overthrow of the Kingdom of Israel, about 10,000 fugitives with a great number of slaves wandered towards the southern part of Asia. The slaves, who had previously adopted the Mosaic faith, murdered their masters on this journey, and took possession of their property, but still continued to observe the ceremonies of Judaism". There may possibly be

some connection between this legend and the tradition mentioned by Jost of a rising of the black Jews against the white Jews of India.

V. Mr Elkan Adler accounts for the absence of both Cohens and Levites from among the Beni Israel by stating that "they are, and admit that they are, the descendants of slaves and converts mostly Hindoo women". These statements were strenuously denied by members of the Beni Israel community, who contended that the tribe were on the whole pure-blooded. Mr Adler remarks that the congregation in Bombay avail themselves of the presence of Bagdad Cohens to attend their services. It is to be noted, that the Cochin Black Jews like other sections of Jewry include Cohanim.[1]

VI. Note on the Cochin Jews, by Basnage.

"I know not what we ought to think of a long Letter, which the Jews of Cochin writ some years ago in Hebrew, to the Synagogue of Amsterdam; for they say, 'That they withdrew into the Indies at the time that the Romans Conquer'd the Holy Land. They affirm, they have had seventy-two Kings there, succeeding one another for a thousand Years; and that then a Division arising through the jalousie of two Brothers, who disputed the Crown, the neighbouring

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, (*Jewish Chronicle*, July 20, 1906).

Princes subdu'd them. From that time they continu'd subject to the Indian Kings. However they had given so many Testimonies of their Loyalty to these Princes, that Samuel Castoel who died in 1640, was Governour of Cochin, and left his Government to a Man of the same Name and Religion with himself'. I will not determin whether this Letter be false or spurious, having no Proofs. But however this Succession of seventy-two Kings, founded upon the Jews' retreat to Cochin in Titus's time, seems only an Invention to support the glory of the Nation. They refer us to remote time and unknown Histories because there is nothing to be found in this present time that can impose upon us".

VII. Mr Elkan Adler is of the opinion that the charter was granted in the eighth century "by Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the King, or Perumal of the Malabar coast. . . . It has been for some time in the possession of the White Jews of Cochin. They say they have always held it; the Black Jews contend that it was originally theirs . . . the title deed is quaint in many ways. It consists of three strips of copper, of which one is blank; one etched on both sides, and the third one, one side only. The characters are made legible by being rubbed with whitening. The copper plates have a round hole in the corner, through which a string was passed to tie them together

under seal, but the seal is lost. They are now kept together by a thin and narrow copper band (like our india-rubber bands) which just fits ".[1]

VIII. With reference to these blue Chinese tiles, Mr Elkan Adler (on the authority of Mr Thurston of the Madras Museum) relates a curious tale. He states that " the Synagogue was built nearly 200 years ago in a corner of the Rajah's palace-yard. At that time the Dutch were in possession of what is now British Cochin, and they were the only people trading with China. The Rajah, through his allies, the Dutch, had imported a large quantity of the best China tiles to pave his Durbar, but the Jews . . . thought they would just do for the synagogue, they were building, so they told the Rajah that he could not possibly use them, inasmuch as bullock's blood had been employed in their manufacture. His Highness, much perturbed at the indignity to so sacred an animal, bade them take the tiles away and never let him see them again. Hence their presence in the Synagogue ".[2]

[1] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, ii : Cochin. (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 11, 1906.) [2] E. N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, ii : Cochin. (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 11, 1906.)

CHAPTER IX

CHINA

Their First Appearance—Their Origin—Their Records—Their Present State—The Sect which Extracts the Sinews—Social and Commercial Activities—The Temple at Kai-Fung-Foo —The End of the Settlement.

ALTHOUGH the early Jewish colonies in China do not in the aggregate appear ever to have reached the size of other settlements of the race in Asia, there can be little doubt that few of the other outlying communities established in that continent surpass them in point of antiquity, even though it is admitted that there is much in their history that is doubtful, and more that is obscure. The members of the earliest settlements of the Chinese Jews had a tradition that they were the descendants of travellers from Bactria and Parthia in the days when those ancient kingdoms were under the sway of the powerful conqueror, Antiochus the Great.[1] These wandering Jews were traders who had been attracted, in the first

[1] Mr. Elkan Adler remarks in his *Jews in Many Lands* that "the Chinese Jews of Kai-Fong-Foo are probably originally from Bokhara, the Persian rubrics in their liturgies being in the Bokharan dialect".

instance, by the commercial opportunities of the traffic with Ceylon, whence they found their way into China, and, ascertaining that the latter country was suitable for their business purposes, eventually changed a temporary residence for a permanent one, and settled in the Chinese Empire.[1]

On the other hand, certain Jewish residents in China, who lived there at the close of the seventeenth century, informed a Jesuit priest, Father Gonzani, that their ancestors came from the Kingdom of Judah, "and that they first appeared in the Empire (of China) under the Han Dynasty". The Han was the fifth of the twenty-two Dynasties. It began two hundred and six years before, and ended two hundred and twenty years after Christ, so that one cannot, by this account, tell within four hundred years when the Jews, according to this version, entered China. However, other authorities get closer to the date of their arrival, and Father Brotier, another Jesuit missionary, asserted that he was informed that, according to the oral tradition of the Chinese Jews, they entered China under the Han Dynasty, during the reign of Han Ming-to (58-76 A.D.). Then we learn of Sulaiman, a Jewish traveller of the ninth century, who claimed to have discovered the exact date, which he gave as 65 A.D. Finally Graetz placed the first immigration in the year

[1] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii.

231 A.D., connecting it with the persecution of the Jews in Persia.

Gonzani was informed, about the year 1704, that there were then only seven "families" of Jews left, to which number "they had been reduced". The word "family" is of course used only in its tribal significance. Jost furnishes a list of these seven "families" and affords information respecting the countries from which they came. He quotes de Guignes,[1] who, writing in 1808, estimated the number of the survivors of the seven "families" at about a thousand souls. Other and more recent authorities computed the number at only 600.[2] It is probable that about a thousand years earlier, the number of the Jews in China was very considerable. We are told, "they must have been pretty numerous in 845 A.D., provided an Ordinance made in the Fifth Year of the Emperor Vutsong . . . relates to them; for the Bonzas (Priests) of Tatsing, or Judea, and Mu-ha-pa, in all three thousand, are condemned, as well as the other Bonzas, to return to a secular life". This incident is mentioned in Du Halde's history of China, but very little information on the whole respecting the Jews in China at this period has been forthcoming.

[1] *Histoire de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres depuis son tablissement avec les Memoires de Littérature, tirez des registres de cette Academie depuis son renouvellement*, xlviii, 763 et seq. 1808.
[2] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii.

Their existence was unknown in Europe, and even the ubiquitous Benjamin of Tudela does not seem to have penetrated as far as the flowery land.

There is, however, an *Account Written by Two Mohammedan Travellers through India and China*, in 851, which mentions the Jews, but the information afforded is not very extensive. All we are told, is that "The Jews have been settled in that empire (China) from time immemorial", and we further learn, that at the period of the visit, "many of them for the sake of riches, and preferment, have abjured their own religion", a statement confirmed by other writers.[1] According to Professor Chavannes, it seems very probable that a new colony of Jews was established in China in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as he remarks that "between 960 and 1126 (Sung Dynasty), Jews coming from India brought, for the first time, as tribute to the court of China, stuffs from western maritime countries ('Si yang poo'). The Jews came to China by sea, and not by crossing central Asia; they were members of the Jewish colonies settled in India. Lastly their arrival does not appear to have been prior to the end of the 10th century C.E." .[1]

Much of the little knowledge we possess about the Jews in China has been brought to light by the examination and translation of the inscriptions on certain

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 33.

marble tablets, formerly placed in the Temple at Kai-Fung-Foo, on which were engraved data respecting the history of the Jews of that city and of other parts of China. These inscriptions have been deciphered on more than one occasion, and although slightly different historical versions are afforded, the accounts are similar as regards the main points recorded. The statements which appear on the earliest of the tablets, which is dated 1489, declare that the Emperor Hiao-Tsong (in the year 1163), granted the Jews the privilege of settling in the town of Pien Lang (afterwards known as Kai-Fung-Foo), and of building a temple there. Either that year, or the next, saw the completion of the building, which had been carried out by a certain Yen-Too-la. This temple was rebuilt in 1279, or according to another version in 1296. At this period, the Jews of China had considerable importance in the affairs of the Empire. Marco Polo "refers to the powerful commercial and political influence of the Jews of China in 1286",[1] and other evidence is not wanting to confirm his statements. We learn that "in the annals of the Mongolian Dynasty for the years 1329 and 1354, at the time when the Mongolian power began to dwindle, Jews are mentioned as having been summoned to Pekin to assist the Imperial Army. In both documents they are named *Dju-Hada* (Yehidim).

[1] *See* Murray's Translation of *Polo's Travels*, p. 99.

Most certainly they were then numerous and of great influence, and their assistance with men and means was considered by the Government as a support to be reckoned with. . . ." [1] In the year 1390, the Jews were granted additional privileges by the Emperor Tai-tsou, the founder of the Ming Dynasty. In all probability, it was this emperor or his immediate successor, who presented the synagogue at Kai-Fung-Foo with the censers, the incense for which was also presented by the Emperor. The temple was repaired in the year 1421 : forty years later it was destroyed by a flood, but it was rebuilt by a prominent member of the community. At the end of the inscription on the tablet of 1489, it is stated that it was set up " on a fortunate day, in the middle of summer, in the second year of Hung-che, A.D. 1488 (read 1489), in the forty-sixth year of the seventieth cycle, by a disciple of the religion of Truth and Purity ".[2]

The second tablet was erected in the year 1512, and so far as its historical information is concerned, differs very little from the tablet of 1489. It was erected " by the families, Yen, Lè, Kaou, Chaou, Kin, E, and Chang, at the rebuilding of the Synagogue in the seventh year of Ching-tih, of the Ming Dynasty, A.D. 1511 (read 1512) ".

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[1] Perlmann, *The Jews in China.* [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 34.

China

The first reports of any consequence about the Jews in China to reach Europe were those communicated to the Vatican by Father Matteo Ricci,[1] the founder of the Jesuit Mission at Pekin, who arrived in China about the year 1581. He does not, however, appear to have learnt of the existence of the Jews until more than twenty years after his arrival, when he was called upon by a young Israelite named Nazi, who had come from Kai-Fung-Foo to Pekin, for the public examinations held in that dity. Nazi gave the Jesuit Father full information respecting the communities of Kai-Fung-Foo and Hang-Chow, and Ricci, who was much interested in what he had heard, took steps to verify the information, and sent one of his subordinates to investigate the matter. Later, in the year 1613, Father Julius Aleni visited Kai-Fung-Foo. In 1642 [2] Semmedo wrote, "Jews were living in four towns of China and very much esteemed by their neighbours". A third tablet, dated 1663, after relating some details respecting early Jewish history, dwells "on the conformity of Jewish law and literature with those of the Chinese". Having recited the history of the settlement, it gives a graphic account of the rebellion which caused the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1642, and the destruction of the city, the temple, and many Jewish lives, and of the rescue of the sacred writings

[1] *See* Note I, p. 159. [2] Semmedo, *Imperio de la China.* Madrid, 1642.

by a Jewish mandarin who, with the help of the troops, restored the city and rebuilt it, in the year 1653. This mandarin was named Chao-Yng-Cheng. He came from the province of Chen-Si and was specially appointed, together with his brother Yng-teon, to restore the town of Kai-Fung-Foo; he finally "induced the Jews to cross the river and take up their old quarters, and rebuild the temple. . . . Chao wrote an account of the saving of the scrolls and the rebuilding of the temple which was expanded by his brother into a book of ten chapters. . . ." [1]

The importance of the Jewish Colonies in China gradually lessened after the commencement of the seventeenth century; "so long as the Jewish inhabitants . . . continued to enjoy the imperial protection as mighty men of commerce, their Persian brethren furnished them with all the necessary means of religious education ".[2] Later their commercial and social decline interrupted their connections with the Jews of other states, and they gradually relapsed into ignorance and poverty. Catholic and Protestant missionaries endeavoured to convert them, while some drifted into Mohammedanism, and thus, despite occasional efforts on the parts of co-religionists in other parts of the world, in the course of the latter

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iii, p. 665. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 35.

part of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries the greater part of the Jews of China became merged in the general population, leaving a mere handful who still call themselves by the name of Jews, but whose knowledge of their religion and its rites fades day by day, gradually overwhelmed by the constant pressure of their Chinese isolation and the deadening effect of the absence of leaders and teachers.

It is somewhat remarkable that in China alone of all the countries of the world, the Jews are characterized by a name—Tiao Kiu Kiaou—(the sect which extracts the sinews), which refers to a Jewish custom of great antiquity indeed, but which most certainly has not been considered elsewhere of such importance as to have actually given the local name to the race. It is not clear whether the custom of the extraction " of the sinew which shrank which is upon the hollow of the thigh ",[1] or that more elaborate system of removing the sinews and veins of animals before they are ritually fit for food, which is pursued " in order that the blood may flow away the easier ", gave the Chinese name to the Jews.[2] In any case, it is curious that no greater distinctive peculiarity of the Jews suggested itself to the Chinese for the purposes of a name to mark their distinction from other races.

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[1] *Genesis* xxxii, 33. [2] Astley, *New Voyages and Travels*, vol. iv.

Little as is known of the history of the Jews of China, until the seventeenth century, still less has come to light respecting their social condition, their business occupations, or their religious associations. It is, however, quite clear that the Jews of China never had to face intolerance or persecution on account of their religion, that they always had full civil and political rights, and were never subjected to any restrictive legislation. That in such circumstances almost entire assimilation with the surrounding populace should have taken place is perhaps not surprising. The innate firmness of the Jewish character has frequently preserved the Jewish faith under the most oppressive legislation and violent persecution, but there can be little doubt that liberty and full emancipation have often contributed to a weakening of religious ties and a neglect of the ancient faith with all its obligations and duties. To this may be added the fact that the Chinese Jews were absolutely isolated from their co-religionists in other parts of the world, with perhaps the sole exception of Persia, where the Jews were poor and ill-treated. Gradually the old usages and customs were abandoned or forgotten. There were apparently no incentives to keep up a religion which differed so greatly from that of their neighbours, and thus their numbers dwindled and dwindled, and the few who remained faithful retained less and less of

the practices of Judaism. Ethical ideals took the place of the Mosaic Code, and even as far back as the date of the tablet of 1489, the inscription deals with this new aspect of the Jewish religion amid Chinese environment. We are told that " those who practise this religion are found in other places than Peen (Kai-Fung-Foo), but wherever they are met with, they all without exception, honor the sacred writings and venerate *Eternal Reason* in the same manner as the Chinese, spurning superstitious practises and image-worship. These sacred books concern not Jews only, but all men, Kings, and subjects, parents and children, old and young. Differing little from our (the Chinese) laws, they are summed up in the worship of heaven (God), the honour of parents, and the veneration of ancestors ".[1] This inscription on one of the memorial tablets of the principal Jewish temple in China distinctly shows the advance of ethical principles among the Chinese Jews of the fifteenth century, and emphasizes the fact that Chinese isolation had almost entirely obliterated the ancient, and almost forgotten, rites and customs of the Jewish religion.

The information afforded from a perusal of the inscriptions of the 1512 tablet gives some idea of the social and commercial activities of the Jews in China in the sixteenth century. We are informed that they

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 34.

" excel in agriculture ", as well as " in merchandise, in magistracies, and in warfare ". It is further observed that the Jews " are highly esteemed for integrity, fidelity, and a strict observance of their religion ",[1] and these attestations with regard to their social qualities are of considerable importance in view of Finn's statement that the second and third tablets were set up by non-Israelites.[2] When the Jewish temple in Kai-Fung-Foo was destroyed by the great inundation of the Whang Ho (or Yellow River), which overflowed the city in 1642, only one of the scrolls of the Law was recovered from the flood, and even this was damaged and the characters half effaced. Twelve complete copies of the rescued scroll in memory of the twelve tribes of Israel were thereupon made. " Other holy writings and prayer books were repaired by members of the community whose names are perpetuated in the tablet (of 1663) together with the names of all the dignitaries who took part in the restoration " of the temple.

There is a lengthy description of the Kai-Fung-Foo temple (which was rebuilt in 1653 under the instructions of the Jewish Mandarin), in the fourth volume of Astley's *Voyages and Travels*. The account is taken from Father Gozani's letter which is included in the seventh volume of the *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses*,

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 34. [1] *The Jews in China*.

written by the Jesuit missionaries and published by Du Halde, who refers to it in his work.[1] Jost states that this synagogue " bore a greater resemblance to the Temple at Jerusalem than other structures of the kind. It stood on an open square, surrounded by trees and a few small pavilions ".[2] According to Gozani, " In the middle of the Synagogue is a magnificent Pulpit, standing very high, with a noble Cushion richly embroidered in it : This is Moses's Pulpit, on which, every Saturday (their Sabbath) and the most Solemn Days, they lay the book of the Pentateuch, and read it ". The temple faced west and did not possess an Altar, but " an incense Pan, a long table, and some large Candlesticks, with Tallow Candles. On some tables were thirteen kinds of Tabernacles, in Form of an Ark, with little Curtains before them : Twelve represented the Tribes of Israel, and the thirteenth, Moses ; whose sacred King (or Pentateuch) was shut up in each of them ". An explanatory footnote remarks that " These Tabernacles are peculiar to the Chinese Jews ", but it would appear that the Ark must have been divided into thirteen sections in each of which was placed a Sepher (Scroll of the Law). De Sacy asserted that each of the scrolls lay on a silk-covered table : he remarked that in all probability there was only one main table, which

[1] Vol. i, p. 678. [2] *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii.

was the ordinary "*Almemar* (reading desk) of a synagogue.

Father Tobar [1] mentions other descriptions of the temple, written subsequently to Gozani's account, and of these perhaps the most important are those contributed by Fathers Domenge and Brotier, and the pamphlet written by Bishop George Smith. The latter was the most complete, in Father Tobar's opinion, but the former contained plans which afford details which are wanting in other accounts. The drawings and plans were reproduced in Marcus Adler's Lecture on the Chinese Jews, in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and in Father Tobar's monograph, and they present views of the temple and the courts which admirably illustrate what must have been a unique example of a Jewish place of worship in an absolutely Chinese environment. It is stated in these accounts that the temple proper resembled a Chinese structure, with appropriate ornaments and Chinese inscriptions. The site extended over a surface of something like 60,000 square feet, the greater part of which was occupied by four successive courts, the temple proper being placed in the centre of the fourth court. The first court was adorned by a handsome arch, which was named Paileou, or Paefang, and bore an inscription in golden letters dedicating the temple "to the

[1] *Inscriptions Juives de K'ai-Fong-Fou.*

Creator and Preserver of all things". A few trees were planted in this courtyard, but there were no buildings in it. The second court was entered from a great gateway, consisting of a large door, used only on great occasions, and two side doors for ordinary purposes. This court contained two dwelling-houses for the use of the Keepers of the Temple. The third court was entered by a decorative arch similar to that in the first court. Right and left of the arch were two small pavilions in which were deposited two historical commemorative tablets, one of them referring to Chao, the Jewish Mandarin, and the other in memory of the builder of the last temple erected on the site—the temple in existence at the time of the visit of Bishop Smith. At that period the two pavilions in the third court were so blocked up with rubbish that it was difficult to gain an entrance, which had to be made through holes in the walls, and the inscriptions were copied with great difficulty by candlelight. The fourth court was beautified by an avenue of trees and possessed a great brazen censer flanked by two marble lions on pedestals of the same material. This court contained a building designated as the "Hall of Ancestors". "Here were venerated, after the Chinese manner—probably at the high festivals in the spring and autumn—the Patriarchs of the Old Testament history. The name of each was recorded on a

tablet; there were no pictures; to each of them was assigned a censer for incense, the largest being for Abraham, others for the other Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Ezra. Then there was an open place where they put up every year, on the Feast of Tabernacles, a booth covered with boughs and ornamented with flowers".[1]

Another account states that the synagogue proper consists of "three apartments before, and three behind thrown into one large hall. The roof is divided into two, and exhibits the four corners of the front and back range of apartments distinct. It is covered with round tiles of a green colour. The front series is provided on the three sides with long varnished windows, based on stone railings. The back series of apartments is surrounded on the three sides by walls. The back series of apartments together constitute a hall, eighty feet deep and fifty feet wide. . . . In front of the Synagogue is a terrace, fifty feet by forty, once surrounded on its three sides by a stone balustrade, which is now (1850) in ruins. On the terrace is one small stone vase and three larger ones, engraven all over with the flowers and leaves of the water-lily (Nelumbium). . . . On the right and left is placed a pair of moderately sized stone lions. In front of the terrace is a hexagonal iron vase, enclosing a smaller

[1] Marcus N. Adler, *Chinese Jews.*

one, and bearing an inscription, in small characters, intimating that it was made for the synagogue on a fortunate day, in the 3rd month of spring, in the time of Wan-leigh (1572) C.E ".[1] In front of the first series of apartments there was a white tablet with black characters bearing the following inscription: " To the Lord of the Religion of Truth and Purity ". This tablet had been erected in the fourth year of the reign of Kang-he, i.e., 1688. Before the second series of apartments of the synagogue there was in the centre a white tablet, with the following inscription: " This Religion is in accordance with Heaven, the True ". The tablet appears to have been erected in the fourteenth year of the reign of Shunche, i.e., 1657. Many other inscriptions on tablets and pillars were dispersed through the synagogue and the apartments, and in the centre of the great hall " was the so-called chair of Moses . . . corresponding . . . to the Almemar "[2] of other Jewish places of worship. Bishop Smith calls this " the teacher's chair ", and remarks that it was " on an elevation of three feet ". In front of it " there is a large incense table, and a large square table behind it, upon which is the Emperor's tablet, inscribed in golden letters: ' May the Emperors of the Great Ts'hing (Tartar) dynasty reign for myriads and

[1] Rt. Rev. George Smith, *The Jews at K'ae-Fung-Foo.*
[2] Mar-cus N. Adler, *Chinese Jews.*

myriads of years' ". Both Finn and Adler mention that the " Chair of Moses " was surmounted by a dome in the ceiling, bearing the following words in Hebrew characters : " Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Blessed be the name of the Glory of His Kingdom for ever and ever ". It is curious that Bishop Smith's report should have omitted to notice so important an expression of the Jewish faith, placed in so prominent a position. Finn states that " after this, a triple arch bears the following inscription, likewise in Hebrew : ' Blessed be the Lord for ever. The Lord is God of Gods, and the Lord. A Great God ' ". Then there is " a large table, upon which are placed six candelabra, in one line, with a great vase for incense, having handles and a tripod standing, halfway along the line. These candelabra are in three different forms and bear three different kinds of lights. Those nearest the vase bear torches, the next on each side have candles, and those at the extremities, ornamental lanterns. Near this table is a laver for washing hands. Lastly, the Beth-el, or Teen-tang (house of heaven), square in outward shape, but rounded within. Into this none but the rabbi may enter during the time of prayer. Here, upon separate tables, stand twelve rolls of the law, corresponding to the tribes of Israel, besides one in the centre in honour of Moses, each enclosed in a tent of silken curtains. On the extreme

western wall are the tablets of the Ten Commandments in golden letters of Hebrew. Beside each of these tablets, is a closet containing manuscript books, and in front of each closet a table, bearing a vase and two candelabra. The congregation when assembled for devotion are separated from the Beth-el by a balustrade, some standing in recesses along the walls. Against a column is suspended a calendar for the reading of the law. Such is the edifice in which the children of Israel at Kae-Fung-foo worshipped God within the last century. Gozani affirms it to be the only synagogue remaining in the empire. If this be true, that of Hang-chow-foo, mentioned by the first visitor to Ricci, must have shared the fate of that in Nan-king, as related to Semmedo ".[1]

It is stated that in this synagogue " in reading the law, the minister covers his face with a transparent veil of gauze . . . and wears a red silk scarf, depending from the right shoulder and tied under the left arm. By his side stands a monitor to correct his reading, if necessary, who is likewise attended by a monitor. The prayers are chanted, but without musical instruments. The congregation wear no *talith* or garment of fringes during the service. They observe circumcision, Passover, Tabernacles, the Rejoicing of the Law, and, perhaps, the Day of Atonement, for it is said that on

[1] Finn, *The Jews of China.*

one day of the year they fast and weep together in the Synagogue. They keep the Sabbath quite as strictly as do the Jews in Europe. They make no proselytes, and never marry with Gentiles. . . . They never pronounce the ineffable name of God, but say *Etuno*, (Adonai). . . ."

Up to the time of the publication of Finn's *Jews of China*, the temple of Kai-Fung-Foo appears to have been vigilantly cared for and religiously guarded, but only seven years later, in 1850, when Bishop George Smith visited China, the two Chinese Christians whom he sent to the town on a mission of inquiry, reported that the temple was partially in ruins, with a few impoverished Jewish families living in the pavilions and the precincts. They were told by certain "professors", that "they had been nearly starved since their temple had been neglected", but the missionaries were allowed to visit the building, and they wrote separate reports of their journey to Kai-Fung-Foo, their impressions of the temple, together with a description of the inscriptions. One of these missionaries stated "that whenever anyone was known to belong to the Jewish religion they were soon despised and became poor; none of the Chinese would make friends with them, and they were treated as outcasts by the common people. Many of those who professed the same religion did so in secret and not openly, lest they should

be despised also". In these circumstances it seems somewhat remarkable that these missionaries, according to their own diary, apparently fled from the place, apprehending that the Jews were about to denounce them to the police, as it does not seem probable that if they were so despised and poor, much notice would have been taken of their complaints. The second of the missionaries reported that the temple "was in a very ruinous state". He was informed by the "three or four" Jews encountered, that "they had no teachers, and that within the Synagogue, there were only four or five families residing". He states that "The Jews have three kinds of office-bearers; the Rabbi, the Sinew Extractor, and the Propagator of Doctrines. Whenever the day arrives for honouring the sacred writings, the disciples must all bathe in the place appointed for that purpose, after which they may enter the synagogue. The Rabbi then takes his seat on an elevated platform, with a large red satin umbrella held over him. This umbrella is still preserved in the Synagogue. When they bow down to worship, they face the West, and in calling upon God, in the Chinese language, they use the word *T'heen* (Heaven). . . . The reason of the present neglect of the Jewish religion is, because for these fifty years, there has been no one to instruct the professors in the knowledge of the fifty-three sections of the Divine classic (the

Pentateuch) and in the twenty-seven letters of the Jewish Alphabet" . . .[1] Benjamin II included a chapter on "The Jews in China" in his *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, but little of what he related was supplied from his own experiences. The work contained English and French versions of a letter written by the Chief Rabbi of Strassburg, which, however, gave little fresh information.

From time to time, after the publication of Bishop Smith's pamphlet, attempts were made to communicate with the Chinese Jews by their co-religionists in Europe, and by Protestant and Catholic missionaries. Articles were published in various periodicals, committees were formed to elucidate information, and other steps taken to get into touch with the lingering survivors of the formerly important Jewish colony. For one reason or another all these attempts failed and those Jews of the Kai-Fung-Foo community who did not assimilate with the surrounding population left the town for other centres where they could improve their position, and keep in touch with their co-religionists. As late as the year 1864, a committee of prominent Jewish residents of London arranged for Benjamin II to visit Kai-Fung-Foo, but unfortunately the traveller died very suddenly on the eve of his departure, and the expedition did not take

[1] Rt. Rev. G. Smith, *The Jews at K'ae-Fung-Foo.*

place. The committee afterwards arranged to send some Chinese representatives, "but this attempt too proved abortive".[1] According to an account contributed by Mr D. J. Mills to a periodical entitled *China's Millions*,[2] the partial destruction of the temple, noticed by the missionaries sent by Bishop Smith, culminated in the complete wrecking of the buildings about the year 1856. Mr Mills remarks: "The destruction of the building began by poorer members among them (i.e., the local Jews) filching, here a stone, and there a few bricks. There being no recognized head, this went on till the whole place was demolished, the remaining materials being sold to the Mohammedans. This demolition was completed about thirty-five years ago. One could hardly help weeping at seeing the desolation of this spot, where for so many centuries the God of Abraham had been worshipped". Mr Mills reported that there were still two hundred families of Jews scattered over the city of Kai-Fung-Foo at this period (1891), although only one family still resided in what was formerly the Jewish quarter. "The site of the Temple is now partly a rubbish heap and partly a pool of water. A stone tablet in the centre serves to preserve the spot as the property of the Jewish Community".

Probably the last account of a visit to the site of the

[1] Marcus N. Adler, *Chinese Jews*. [2] Vol. xvi, no. 4, April, 1891.

Temple, was the reprint in the *American Hebrew* of an article in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* by a German officer, J. J. Liebermann, but who Marcus N. Adler stated was really a Herr Lehmann. It is possible that the American paper confused the identity of the writer, for a Jew named J. L. Liebermann visited Kai-Fung-Foo in 1867, and the account of what he saw there, written in Hebrew, was translated by Dr Löwy, of London, and published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, in 1879. At all events, the traveller (whether Liebermann, or Lehmann) is stated to have been a Jewish officer [1] in "the German army of occupation in Kiao-Chao, China", and he gives a report "about the present-day Jewish Colony", i.e., of the year 1899. He states that his interpreter informed him that there were about five hundred Jews left in the town, and he introduced him to the "High Priest" who gave him a short résumé of the history of the Jews in China and took him to the site of the former temple. He goes on to say, "some 500 feet from the Yellow River embankment we halted before a demolished gate, marking the entrance to a mighty square, covered with grass-grown ruins, pillars, cornices, and colossal chunks of masonry lying singly or in heaps, as if an earthquake or some similar natural agency of destruction had

[1] Mr S. J. Solomon (*see* p. 22, *Chinese Jews*, by M. N. Adler) speaks of *Colonel* Lehmann, but no professing Jew, at that period, could have been an officer in the German Army.

shaken a great complex of buildings to pieces". It is stated that the "High Priest" admitted that he knew no Hebrew, "and that the Rabbi before him was also innocent of the historic tongue. . . . But this inability to read and enjoy the Scriptures did not diminish the good priest's ardour for the perfect preservation of the colony's literary treasures". Later, the old Rabbi, who appears to have been also a money-changer, removed from a subterranean vault three granite slabs covering three hard and heavy iron-wood chests. "There incased in pieces of thick, soft silk, I saw numerous papyrus and parchment rolls, the oldest probably written twenty-two or twenty-three centuries ago. I recognized a copy of the Pentateuch, on very large parchment".[1]

Before leaving Kai-Fung-Foo, Colonel Lehmann visited the Jewish Colony, which he states numbered between four hundred and fifty and five hundred people, and remarks, "among them are a few upon whom poverty and neglect have not set their baneful seal. The first man I met was the only non-artizan . . . the rest are makers (?), tailors, dealers in fruit, and petty shopkeepers. Like the Jews in other countries, they have adopted the native costume, including the pigtail, and as there were not enough girls

[1] *The Jews in China. The American Hebrew* (New York), January 12, 1900.

of their own nationality to go round, several have married Chinese women. The first deviation from the old-time custom to keep the race pure occurred some fifty years ago ; hence the Jewish type has again begun to spread through the province ". Colonel Lehmann was told that these Jews keep the sabbath, and hold weekly services in the Rabbi's house. They celebrate Passover, Tabernacles, etc., but use the Chinese tongue instead of Hebrew. They also practise the rite of circumcision, which according to other writers was supposed to have fallen into disuse. Some of this information conflicts with the statements of Mr S. J. Solomon referred to in Marcus N. Adler's pamphlet, in which it is suggested that Colonel Lehmann had visited " a place about 100 miles south-west of Kai-Fung-Foo, where there were about 500 native Jews, most of whom were engaged in the silk piece goods trade ". The account published in *The American Hebrew*, however, does not, in the least, lend itself to Mr Solomon's statement, as Colonel Lehmann definitely speaks of Kai-Fung-Foo and the ruins of the Jewish colony one hundred miles from that town.

The last page in the history of the famous synagogue of Kai-Fung-Foo appears to have been closed by the announcement in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of February 7th, 1913, that the remaining Jewish inhabitants of the town had sold the site of their former temple to

the " Canadian Mission " and that the transfer of the property had been officially confirmed. The authorities of the Mission were stated to be the custodians of the memorial stones.

NOTES

I. " ' Tis pretended farther, that the ten Tribes appear, and make a figure in China. The Jew we have spoken of, and who, being deceiv'd by the Jesuit Raci, worship'd the Virgin, maintain'd that there were at Pequin ten or twelve Families of Israelites and a Synagogue which had cost them ten Thousand Crowns to repair. He asserted, that they had been settl'd in this Province about five hundred Years, and that they religiously preserv'd one of the five Books of Moses, which he call'd Sepher Thora. He could not read Hebrew, having neglected the Study of it in his youth ; by which negligence, he was excluded from the Offices and Government of the Synagogue, which his Brother exercis'd because he understood the Language, but he repeated the Stories of the Old Testament, particularly those of Abraham, Judith and Esther. He added, That there were in the Capital of the Province of Chequiam, a great many Synagogues, and Israelite Families ; for they give themselves that Name, because being the Posterity of the ten Tribes, they knew not that of Jews. This Account has two things true in it,

one that there are in China, some Jewish Families; the other, that they have there some secret Synagogue. There are also two things false, one the Antiquity this Israelite pretended to. And indeed who could depend upon the sincerity of this Israelite who was ignorant of what related to the Ancient History of his Nation? The other Falsity is, that those who might have pass'd into China for Traffick, made a considerable part of the ten Tribes and the Title of Israelites, which this Jew gave 'em, was not sufficient to prove it ".[1]

II. The Tablets in the Jewish Temple at Kai-Fung-Foo.

i. (Erected by King-chong, a learned Israelite, A.D. 1444).

The author of the law of Israel was Abraham the nineteenth from Adam. This holy man lived 146 years after the beginning of the Chow (dynasty). His law was transmitted to Moses, who received his book on Mount Sinai, when he had fasted forty days and forty nights. He was always nigh unto heaven (God). In that book are fifty-three sections; its doctrine is nearly the same with that of the Chinese sages (here he produces traditions from each, which have great similarity), prescribing nearly the same rites for the worship of heaven (God), for ceremonials, fasting, prayer, and honouring the dead. Moreover,

[1] Basnage, *History of the Jews.*

in the (Chinese) book Yi-king, are found vestiges of observing the Sabbath. Moses lived 613 years after the beginning of the Chow (dynasty). (Then in a reference to Ezra) he by exceeding diligence re-established and reformed the people.

Appended to the above is a statement that the synagogue was destroyed in the eleventh year of Ying-tsung (A.D. 1446), and most of the books spoiled by water, but that fresh books were supplied by Israelites from Ning-po, and Ning-kea, one of whom named Yn, from Ning-po, brought in 1462 a complete copy of the law, by which they corrected what they had remaining. And that in the second year of Hung-che (A.D. 1490) the synagogue was rebuilt at the expense of Yen-too-la.

ii. (Erected by Tsu-tang, Treasurer of the province of Sze-chuen, in the fifteenth year of Hungche).

The law of Israel. Adam the first man was from Teen-chu in the west. The Israelites have a law and tradition. The law is contained in five books, or fifty-three sections. (Then follows a commendation of the law.)

The Israelites worship heaven as we do: the author of their law was Abraham their father: Moses their legislator gave them his law. In the time of Han they settled in this country. In the year 20 of the lxvth

cycle (A.D. 1163), they brought a tribute of Indian cloth to the Emperor Heaou-tsung. Being well received they remained in Kai-fung-foo, which was then called Peen-lang. Then they were seventy Tsung (i.e., surnames or clans). They built a synagogue and in it laid up sacred books, which concern not only themselves but all men, kings and subjects, parents and children, the old and the young. Whosoever studies therein will perceive that their law differs but little from ours. Their summary is, to worship heaven, to honour parents, and to give due veneration to the dead. This people excelling in agriculture, in merchandise, in magistracies, and in warfare, are highly esteemed for integrity, fidelity, and strict observance of their religion. Their law was transmitted from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, to the twelve tribes, to Moses, to Aaron, to Joshua, and to Ezra, who was a second lawgiver.

iii. (Erected A.D. 1663, the second year of Kang-he, by a Mandarin, afterwards Minister of State).

(After mention of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, he extols) "the virtue of Abraham, who adored the effective and preservative cause of all things, without any image or figure. Of the law which Moses received on Mount Sina there are thirteen copies, besides other books. The Israelites came to China in the time of

the Chow (dynasty) ". (After praising their constancy in religion, he adds): "They scarcely differ from us in the worship of heaven, in the duties of civil life, or in honouring the dead. The Sabbath was anciently observed by the Chinese. The Hebrew letters resemble the old Chinese ".

Then there follows a long description of the inundation of 1642, in which the synagogue lost twenty-six of its volumes. There is also described the care taken in 1654 to revise, restore, and transcribe their books, with the names of persons who assisted in rebuilding the synagogue.

iv. This inscription contains the same subject-matter as the previous one, but there are added the names of the seven Hebrew Tsung, then residing in Kai-fung-foo, viz., Tao, Kin, Che, Kao, Teman, Lè, and Ngai.

CHAPTER X

THE YEMEN

First Settlement of Jews—Ezra and the Jews of the Yemen—A Jewish Dynasty—Wars between Jews and Christians—Subsequent Obscurity.

FEW parts of the inhabited globe are or have been less known to the world at large than the south-western portion of the Arabian coast and its hinterland, which, situated north of Aden and half surrounded by the Arabian Desert, was the most outlying of the provinces of the Turkish Empire. Nevertheless, this somewhat unattractive and unfrequented land possessed an important Jewish colony, half a century before the establishment of the Christian religion. Although one tradition among the Yemenite Jews traces the earliest settlement of their ancestors back to the days of King Solomon, their most generally accepted legend is to the effect "that their forefathers settled there forty-two years before the destruction of the first temple".[1]

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 592.

It has further been stated that " under the prophet Jeremiah 75,000 Jews, including priests and Levites, are said to have gone to Yemen ".

Before Ezra returned to Jerusalem, under the auspices of the Persian King Cyrus (458 B.C.), he is said to have previously visited Yemen, in order to induce the large body of Jewish exiles there to return to Palestine. This they refused to do, as they imagined that the newly-promised freedom would not be as general or as lasting as that from the bondage of Egypt, and because they would not lay themselves open to renewed persecution.[1] Thereupon (the legend avers), Ezra became enraged with the Yemenites, and " pronounced an everlasting ban on them. Tradition states, however, that as a punishment for this hasty action, Ezra was denied burial in Palestine ". According to the Jewish Yemenites, the denial of Ezra's wish to rest in Palestine was brought about by their prayers to the Almighty, not to permit the Prophet to see the Holy City again. Benjamin II sums up all the legends by remarking that a " double curse appears to have been brought into fulfilment : Ezra's tomb is in the desert between Bagdad and Bassorah . . . and the Jews of Yemen languish in the most cruel debasement, and in the deepest poverty unto the present day ". If, however, the Jews of the Yemen really suffered

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

under Ezra's curse, it must be admitted that their punishment was considerably delayed. For nearly six hundred years after the Scribe's return to Palestine, the Yemenite Jews prospered very considerably, and, in the second century, a very large immigration is said to have taken place. Although nothing very definite is known respecting their social conditions, it does not seem probable that they would have continued to immigrate into the country for so many centuries, unless the newcomers had received encouraging accounts of the prosperity attained by the older colonists.

Sir Lambert Playfair, in his *History of the Yemen*, tells of a legend concerning "the introduction of the Jewish faith into the Yemen during the reign" of Sultan Abou Kariba, or Aru Karib, early in the third century; but other authorities place the date of this monarch's occupation of the Yemenite throne about a century later,[1] and assert that about the year 325 A.D. "the Kingdoms of Sheba, Raidan, Hadramant, and Yamanat (Yemen) were united under the hegemony of the Yemenite Kings", by King Yahamin, the predecessor of Aru Karib.[2] At all events, somewhere about this period, the Jewish religion is supposed to have spread all over Yemen, and the ruling house of the land is said to have adopted the Jewish faith. The

[1] W. B. Harris, *A Journey through the Yemen.* [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 592.

fourth Jewish monarch of the new royal line was the famous King Dhu Nuwas who, while known to his subjects under this appellation, was called by the Abyssinians, Phineas.[1] Dhu Nuwas came to the Yemenite throne in the year 515, and, according to some authorities, was not a Jew by birth, but embraced Judaism after his accession, when he took the name of Joseph. Accusations of the persecution of the Christians " at the instigation of his counsellors, the rabbis ", appear to have been already levelled at King Shurahbil Yakkuf, a predecessor of Dhu Nuwas.[2] Ludolphus remarks of Dhu Nuwas, that his " natural aversion for Christians was augmented by the Jewish faith which he professed ", and many historians and chroniclers have related tales of lurid deeds of cruelty perpetrated by the Yemenite king upon the unhappy Christians. A study of such historical and legendary accounts as are available, however, would tend to the view that most of these accusations were based on acts which took place largely in the nature of reprisals. In view of recent events it would not have been remarkable if, in the dark days of the sixth century, Dhu Nuwas was filled with bitterness when he heard of the cruelties perpetrated on Jews by the Byzantine

[1] Other versions of Dhu Nuwas' name are " Dunawas " (Ludolphus); " Dunowas " (Salt); " Dimnus " (John Malala, in his *Chronographia*); " Damianus ", etc., etc. The literal meaning of Dhu Nuwas is " curly-headed ". [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 592.

Emperors and Abyssinian Kings, and made reprisals on Christian travellers and Christian converts. Although nearly two hundred years had elapsed since part of the Abyssinian nation had been converted to Christianity, the contest between the two religions had never ceased, and in many of the outlying provinces of Ethiopia and the Kingdoms in its vicinity, Judaism had still a strong hold on the population, and more than one king ruled under the laws of Moses. Dhu Nuwas is stated to have successfully propagated Judaism in the Yemen, and it is fair to conjecture that the reports of his progress, coupled with the accounts of his enthusiasm for his faith and his activity for proselytism, inflamed the statements with respect to the cruelties which he is said to have perpetrated on Christians.

Eventually Dhu Nuwas' zeal for Judaism involved him in a dispute with a dependency of the Yemen—the Christian town of Najiran. He made war against the city, which ultimately capitulated, whereupon the King is said to have offered the citizens the choice between the acceptance of the Jewish faith or death, and, on their refusal to apostasize, he is reported to have executed their chief together with more than three hundred of the principal citizens. Accounts of this occurrence as well as reports of Dhu Nuwas' Jewish proclivities were communicated to the Emperor

Justinus I, who, being then engaged "in an unsuccessful war with the Persians . . . could not give any assistance to the afflicted Christians in Arabia. But in the year 522 he sent an embassy to Caleb, or Elasbaas, king of Abyssinia, entreating him to interfere in favour of the Christians of Najiran".[1] Caleb, who no doubt was as enthusiastic for Christianity as Dhu Nuwas was for Judaism, complied with the Emperor's request, and, crossing the Red Sea, made war on the Yemenite King, who was unable to prevent his landing on the coast.[2] "The ensuing engagement terminated disastrously for Dhu Nuwas. His city of Zafora (Thafar), together with his queen and the treasure, fell into the hands of the enemy. Preferring death to capture, Dhu Nuwas rode into the sea and was drowned" (525 A.D.).

In the notes to the history of the Yemen by the old Arabian chronicler, Omarah-Al-Hakami, it is stated that Dhu Nuwas was the last of the Himyarate Kings of Yemen. He sought to force the inhabitants of the country into the acceptance of Judaism, the religion which he had himself adopted, and the savage cruelty with which he pursued his design is denounced in the Kurán (S. LXXXV), where he is proclaimed as doomed to the torments of hell. These persecutions of the

[1] Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile.* [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iv, p. 553.

Christians of Najiran brought about the invasion and conquest of the Yemen by the Abyssinians, who were themselves expelled by the Persians. It is asserted that the Christians of Najiran had before the introduction of Christianity been themselves professors of the Jewish Faith.[1] Many historians have doubted the veracity of the whole, or of part of these accounts of Dhu Nuwas, and, according to Abyssinian sources, the Jewish Kingdom did not come to an end with the defeat of the Yemenite King. Bruce states that,[2] " that part of Arabia, near Najran, which was the scene of Caleb's victory ", actually belonged to the Emperor Justinus. Further south another part of Arabia—the province of Yemen—was claimed by the Abyssinians as part of their Empire, and Abreha, Governor of Yemen, took part in Caleb's campaign. " But neither of the Jewish Kingdoms were destroyed by the victories of Caleb, or Abreha ; nor the subsequent conquest of the Persians. In the Neged, or north part of Arabia, they continued not only after the appearance of Mahomet, but till after the Hegira, for it was in the 8th year of that era, that Hybar, the Jew, was besieged in his own castle in Neged, and slain by Ali, Mahomet's son-in-law, from that time called Hydar-Ali, or Ali the Lion " (circa 630 A.D.).[2] Nothing further is

[1] *Yemen, its Mediæval History*, by Najin Ad-din Omarah-Al-Hakami. . . . Notes by H. C. Kay. [2] Bruce, *loc. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 443.

heard of Dhu Nuwas (or Phineas), in Bruce's account of these transactions, and whether "Hybar, the Jew", was a descendant of the "curly-headed" Yemenite King does not appear. Over a century had elapsed since the supposed death of the Jewish warrior monarch and there seems to be little doubt that the valour of Dhu Nuwas had extended to his successor, the last of the line of the Jewish kings of the Yemen.

Little information is afforded respecting the Jews of the Yemen for a considerable period after the sixth or seventh centuries. Jost seems to have been of the opinion that the majority of them were absorbed in the general population and that only a residue remained Jews by custom and religion. It is, however, feasible that Dhu Nuwas of Yemen, and Phineas of Abyssinia, were identical,[1] and that the Yemenite King, after his defeat by the combined forces of Caleb and Abreha, retired to the mountainous countries of Samen, Dembea, and the adjoining states, and there, followed by masses of Jews from Abyssinia, Ethiopia, and north and south Yemen, formed the independent Jewish state of Samen whose existence was to be prolonged for so many centuries. It is true, that as far as can be ascertained, nearly two centuries had elapsed between the commencement of the reigns of Abreha and Atzbeha (when Christianity was introduced into

[1] Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii, p. 167.

Abyssinia) and the year 525 when Dhu Nuwas was defeated, but none of the chroniclers appears to be certain of the dates of this period, and it is quite within the bounds of problematic history that the Phineas selected by the Falashas to rule over them was the heroic Dhu Nuwas, the defeated, but undaunted, Jewish King of Yemen.

Although nothing further was heard of the Jewish kingdoms in the Yemen after Hydar-Ali's victory in the seventh century, it is quite evident that a Jewish population remained in the country, although little is known of their condition or their habits. The Saracen domination continued, and when Saladin became sultan in the last quarter of the twelfth century, the position and safety of the Jews were endangered by the campaign of a false prophet who preached the imminence of an amalgamation of the Jewish and Mohammedan faiths. Benjamin of Tudela has left some notes on the Jews of Yemen about this period, according to which " their capital was Teima, and they called themselves Rechabites, while at their head stood the Nasi Hanan. They were in constant strife with their Ismaelitic neighbours, from whom they won many victories and took much booty ".[1] These remarks of the famous Jewish traveller seem to indicate that the Jews of the Yemen possessed still in

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 593.

his time a qualified independence, and they appear to have been left in possession of the results of their successes. Nevertheless, the references to the Yemen Jews are very scanty, and the country itself has ever been a kind of *terra incognita* to the world at large. Jost remarks that " the religious condition of the Jews in Arabia appears to have been plunged in practically unpenetrable darkness, and nothing was known with regard to their religious sects (although Niebuhr thought that there were Caraites amongst them), their political history, their literary efforts, their business activities, or their traditions ".

During the long centuries which have elapsed since the days of the Saracen domination, little has been heard of the Yemenite Jews. From time to time, local Jewish authors have written, and even published, religious and theological treatises, but the Jews do not appear to have been prominent in other directions. Even the advent of a more direct Turkish rule in the middle of the nineteenth century does not appear to have materially improved the status of the Yemenite Jews, who in recent years have left the country in thousands for Palestine, to join the newly established colonies there.

CHAPTER XI

THE YEMEN (*continued*)

Jewish Kings—Social and Economic Conditions in the Yemen—Present Conditions—Recent Emigration.

IT has been stated that as early as the commencement of the African trade with Palestine, the Jewish religion had spread itself far into Arabia ; but after the destruction of the temple by Titus, a great increase both of numbers and wealth had made the Jews almost absolute masters of the Arabian Peninsula. In the course of these events several Jewish petty princes, calling themselves kings, became established in Arabia,[1] prominent among whom was Dhu Nuwas, who is said to have persecuted the Christians who found themselves in his power. Among these martyrs there is said to have been a certain Aretas, who was called Aryat by the Arabs and Hawaryat by the Abyssinians. It has sometimes been thought that this " Aretas " was a Christian who is referred to in a Chronicle of the Christian Saints, preserved in the British Museum, under the name of " Arkir ", who was

[1] Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, vol. ii, p. 441.

condemned to death by the predecessor of Dhu Nuwas —Shurahbil Yakkuf.

During the first five centuries of the Christian era the Jewish population of the Yemen has been estimated at about three thousand souls, scattered over the whole of the country, but, in all probability, it was extremely difficult exactly to identify the religion professed by some of the Yemenites, some of whom appear to have been half Christians, half Jews, and, at a later date, addicted to Moslem customs and rites as well. Their prejudices and superstitions were very probably of a most obstinate nature, and we are told that even up to the present date " no Jew or Yemen gives the name of Ezra to a child ", in consequence of the tradition of a feud between the prophet and the Yemenite Jews of which mention has been made in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, the race and the religion survived the many disasters that befell it in the Yemen, despite the constant weakening in the observance of the customs and rites of the faith brought about by the pressure of the rising sister religions and the activity displayed in their propagation. There is even evidence that some of the Yemenite Jews pursued their theological studies with keen interest and a certain amount of success, and the study of the Cabbalah appears to have been as popular with them as with their brethren of Salonica and Safed. They do not appear to have ever been

adepts in commerce or finance, but they seem to have excelled in the making of pottery. It is worthy of notice that the Jews of certain provinces of Abyssinia were also experts in the making of tiles and other ceramic articles of utility and adornment: this may be considered as a support for the theory that a number of the Yemenites fled to Samen and Dembea with or without the King Dhu Nuwas after the disaster that overtook him. In all probability internecine warfare destroyed all chance of commerce, within or without the confines of the country, with the result that "agriculture, industry, and trade rapidly declined, though manual work found a refuge among the Jews".[1]

The isolation of the Yemenite Jews did not interfere with their knowledge of European and Asiatic Jewish literature, especially works of a cabbalistic nature. The poverty of the people, however, has militated for many centuries against their purchase of Hebrew books, and this accounts for the few copies of the Talmud which are seen in the country. In later periods, a little more has been known concerning the position of the Jews of the Yemen, and at the commencement of the nineteenth century, they numbered about 30,000, one-third of whom lived in the town of Sanaa. At the close of that century, a modern traveller computed the

[1] Joshua Feldman, *The Yemenite Jews.*

Jewish population of the capital at double this estimate, and observed that while many of them hired shops in the bazaars, some of these lived in the ghetto. They were allowed to carry on whatever trade they liked and were in a position very different from that of their ancestors three generations earlier, who " were prohibited . . . from engaging in money transactions and were all mechanics, being employed chiefly as carpenters, masons and smiths ".[1]

When Mr Walter B. Harris visited Yemen, about a quarter of a century ago, he made several references to the Jews in the account of his journey. He reported that, in his opinion, they were not ill-treated, or persecuted, and that they only paid their regular share of taxes like other people, " though naturally the Jews, as to nature born, cry out a good deal more than the uatives ". He stated that the present Yemenite Jews " are believed to have come from India, and, as far as is known, there are none remaining of the old Jewish stock of pre-Islamic times. Although much despised by the proud Arabs they are seldom treated with violence or even roughness, and what little persecution there can be said to exist consists almost entirely of the jeers of small boys, and even this is rare ".[2]

About the period of Mr Harris' visit, there were

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xi, p. 593. [2] W. B. Harris, *The Jews of Yemen*.

twenty synagogues in Sanaa, and many schools for boys in which a large number of scholars were trained. The Jewish girls were, however, entirely untaught, and were brought up in ignorance of everything except domestic matters. The town of Sanaa is stated to have been originally founded by warrior Jews, and was known in early Jewish poetry under the name of Udal. Until the Mohammedans conquered the country, it remained under Jewish jurisdiction. Although the Jewish population of the country is still considerable, the number of Jews in Sanaa has greatly diminished. The twenty thousand Jewish inhabitants it was said to have possessed at the end of last century has dwindled to less than three thousand in the second decade of the present one. One of the most recent works on the Yemenite Jews states that " only in Aden and Sanaa are there large communities ; for the rest they live in small towns and villages. Three-fourths of all the Jews are artisans : tailors, shoemakers, weavers, goldsmiths, potters, makers of handmills, brickmakers, workers in tobacco and powder, joiners, smiths, etc. A European Jew can hardly conceive how modest are the requirements of his co-religionists in South Arabia. Even a ' rich ' Yemenite does not eat more than one course at a meal on a weekday ; and the Yemenite immigrants in Palestine who are employed in domestic service must be trained to eat

an adequate meal. As for clothing, they are content with a single shirt. But despite their very modest requirements and their unflagging industry and diligence they are unable to earn the minimum for their existence and hunger is a frequent guest ".[1]

It seems like a miracle that this scattered fragment of the Jewish people should have defied the tribulations of centuries, in a country in which there is no economic progress, and in which, according to the latest information, fanatical persecution is on the increase. For some time past many of the Yemenite Jews have settled in Aden where they are able to dwell in safety under the British flag, as well as improve their social and financial condition. Mr Elkan Adler visited Aden in 1906 and he was then told that the town contained five thousand Jews, " many of them fugitives from Sanaa. Several have emigrated Europe-wards to Egypt and Palestine. Some have gone on to India. Fighting has been going on around Sanaa for the last year or two between the Turkish Government and the Arabian rebels, and it has had to sustain an awful siege, which resulted in the greatest misery to its inhabitants, and especially to the poor Jews, many of whom died of famine, and its Jewish population has become reduced from 10,000 to barely 2,000 ".[2] At a

[1] Feldman, *The Jews of Yemen.*

[2] Elkan N. Adler, *About the Indian Jews*, i : Aden, May 4, 1906.

still later date some thousands of Yemenite Jews migrated to Palestine " all of whom, with the exception of a small number who remained in the towns, settled as labourers in the Jewish Colonies ".[1]

[1] Feldman, *The Jews of Yemen.*

CHAPTER XII

KURDISTAN

Tiglath Pileser—Nahum, the Prophet—Nineveh—The Sepulchre of Ezra—Benjamin of Tudela's Visit to Kurdistan—David Al Roy—Benjamin II's Visits to Kurdistan—Modern Statistics.

IN the latter days of Pekah, the usurper-King of Israel who raided Jerusalem, that enterprizing soldier of fortune was attacked by Tiglath Pileser, the famous Assyrian monarch, who speedily conquered his territory and took vast numbers of its inhabitants captive to Assyria about the year 738 B.C. At this period Kurdistan formed part of Tiglath Pileser's extensive territories, and it probably included all the country between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries. Here, according to the ancient traditions of the Jews and the Nestorians, many natives of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel were settled by the Assyrian conqueror, and as these Israelites did not return to Palestine or migrate elsewhere, their descendants are, in all probability, still to be found there.[1] Some authorities are, however, of the opinion that the

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

The Jews of Asia

Jews did not settle in Kurdistan till nearly three centuries later, when they arrived there in the time of Ezra.[1] It is stated that their language does not materially differ from that of the Nestorians, which is a modern Syriac dialect and has "idiomatic expressions similar to those occurring in the Babylonian Talmud, in the Aramaic translations of the Bible . . . in . . . Pahlavi inscriptions on monuments, and those on the coins of the Sassanid monarchs" of Persia. Benjamin of Tudela asserts that many of the Jews in this country are the descendants of those who were originally led into captivity by Shalmaneser III, but modern research has proved that it was his successor Sargon who conquered the Kingdom of Israel (circa 721-2 B.C.). According to this author, the province of Khuzestan—the Elam of Scripture, and part of the Kurdistan of later times—commenced about four miles from the site of the sepulchre of Ezra, which he states was in a town (the name of which he does not mention), on the banks of the river Shat-el-Arab, not far from the junction of the Euphrates and the Tigris. Khuzestan, or Khuzistan, is still marked as a province of the Persian Empire, but it is somewhat difficult to trace the border town referred to, which was stated to have had a population of 1,500 Jews. [2]

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[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 585. [2] *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela.* Asher's Edn., vol. i, p. 116.

Kurdistan

In all probability, the prophet Nahum was a resident of the Turkish part of ancient Kurdistan, about six centuries before the Christian Era. Nahum's description of Nineveh, the ruins of which are in the vicinity of Mosul, are very striking, and it may be conjectured that the prophet lived, at all events for a time, in that ancient city. Benjamin of Tudela states that the town contained Nahum's (Nachum Haelkashi) Synagogue, but it may be that several synagogues in Kurdistan and the adjacent provinces were named after the prophet. In the notes to Asher's translation of the *Itinerary*, Colonel Shiel states that he found Nahum's Synagogue near Elkosh (or Alkusch), " east of the Tigris, on the foot of the mountain ", and that the prophet's tomb was " in the synagogue ". Benjamin II confirms the existence of the temple and the tomb of the prophet at Elkosh, at which town, however, there was no Jewish congregation, the Synagogue and the Sepulchre being used as places of pilgrimage for Jews who came from many distant places. When Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians about 606 B.C., there was probably a Jewish colony in the city, consisting perhaps of descendants of some of the captives of Tiglath Pileser and other Assyrian monarchs. It seems questionable whether the prophets Jonah and Nahum would have been inspired to warn the inhabitants of the Assyrian

capital if there had not been a number of their countrymen in the famous city. The town of Mosul is very probably built on the site of a suburb of Nineveh, but practically nothing is known respecting the Jews of the ancient capital, if any of them lived there at the time of its destruction.

There appears to be very little doubt that Ezra, the Scribe, was residing in that part of Babylonia, afterwards known as Kurdistan, at the time of his death. Benjamin of Tudela asserts that "he died on his journey from Jerushalaim to King Artexerxes",[1] while there is a local legend to the effect that he was, at this period, a courtier in the retinue of Artaxerxes. In all probability his death occurred between the years 370 and 360 B.C.[2] When Benjamin II visited Ezra's reputed tomb nearly twenty-two centuries after his death, and about seven hundred years after Benjamin of Tudela's journey, he reported that the sepulchre was "in the middle of the desolate and barren desert El Ozeir . . . on the shore of the River" Tigris. The modern town or village El Oseir, as marked on the maps, is about twelve miles from the junction of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, and this is no doubt the town or village of which Benjamin of Tudela omits to give the name.[3]

Little is known respecting the Jews of Kurdistan

[1] *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. i, p. 116. [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. v, p. 322. [3] *See* Note I, p. 199.

from the time of the death of Ezra to the visit of Benjamin of Tudela, a period of about fifteen hundred years. In all probability, large numbers of Israelites were absorbed into the general population, and it is questionable whether the larger proportion of the inhabitants who were spoken of as Jews by the renowned Jewish traveller retained, even at his period, much more than traces of the ancient religion. Nevertheless, there were still a very large number of observant Jews, a fact well authenticated by Benjamin of Tudela. About the middle of the twelfth century, and ten years before Benjamin's tour, the famous pseudo-Messiah David Al Roy, commenced his romantic career which was to end in so inglorious and ignominious a manner. Al Roy was born, according to *The Itinerary*, in the city of Amadia, in the mountains of Chaphton, a place of which there appears to be no trace to-day, but which possessed at the time of Benjamin's visit, 25,000 Jewish inhabitants. According to a modern traveller, Major Rawlinson, the town of Amadia was in a district called Holwan, in which there was a city of the same name which was "one of the eight primeval cities of the world". The ancient site of Holwan was possibly known later as Sar-Puli-Zohab, and can perhaps be identified with the modern town of Seripul, in the Persian province of Ardalan, and about fifty miles north-east of Kermanshah. This town is in all

probability "the Calah of Ashur, and the Hallah of the Israelitish captivity". At all events, somewhere in these regions Al Roy was born. He was sent to Baghdad to be educated and studied under Hisdai (or Chisdai), the Prince of the Captivity, and Eli (or Ali), the President of the Jewish Academy of the city. He became "an excellent scholar, being well versed in the mosaic law, in the decisions of the Rabbins, and in the thalmud; understanding also the profane sciences, the language and the writings of the Mahommedans, and the scriptures of the magicians and enchanters".[1] At this period the Khalifate of Bagdad was held by Moktafi who had thrown off the yoke of the Sultans and had made himself an independent monarch. How far his rule had spread is doubtful, but it evidently did not extend to Persia. David Al Roy rebelled against the rule of Moktafi and promised to lead the insurgent Jews to Jerusalem. In his native mountains there were a number of warlike Jews and he soon found himself at the head of a considerable following, longing eagerly for the day when they should be released from the Turkish yoke, and freed from the oppression of the Moslems. What eventually occurred is very uncertain, as the few sources from which the history of Al Roy's career can be taken all differ in details and are interspersed with legends of an improbable and

[1] *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. i, p. 122.

miraculous nature. He appears, however, to have failed in his attack, and his followers being defeated, he was put to death, but the manner in which he lost his life is unknown.

According to Benjamin of Tudela, Al Roy revolted against the King of Persia, and being summoned by that monarch to his court, boldly attended it and was subsequently imprisoned by the King.[1] Three days later, he miraculously escaped, and after again visiting the King of Persia's court, fled to his birthplace, Amadia, where he related his adventures to the astonished Jews. Later the King of Persia requested the Caliph of Bagdad, " to solicit the influence of the Prince of the Captivity, and of the presidents of the colleges, in order to check the proceedings of David El Roy, and threatening to put to death all Jews who inhabited his Empire ".[2] The Jews of Persia also wrote to the Prince of the Captivity representing their danger of extermination, and finally a joint letter was sent to Al Roy from the Prince of the Captivity and the President of the Colleges calling upon him to discontinue his campaign on pain of excommunication. Al Roy took no notice of the request, and finally, the Governor of Amadia, Sin-el-Din (or Saif al Din), bribed the father-in-law of the pseudo-Messiah to slay him, and eventually David Al Roy was killed in his

[1] *See* Note II, p. 200. [2] *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. i, p. 125.

sleep by his relative in his own house, and the revolt was brought to an end. The sect of the Menahemites was formed by those who still believed in the claim of Al Roy to be the true Messiah, the name assumed by them being chosen from the full appellation of Al Roy, which was " Menahem ben Suleiman ibn Abruhi ".

Many romantic myths and legends have clustered about the life of this celebrated impostor, but perhaps the most interesting and exciting of these tales is that written by Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, who relates a history of " Al Roy " of enthralling vividness, which, in almost every detail, is nothing more than a fiction of wonderful dexterity born of an oriental imagination. Appeased by the petitions and prayers of the Jews of Persia and Kurdistan, together with the good offices of the Prince of Captivity, and a present of one hundred talents of gold, the King of Persia finally forgave the Jews of Kurdistan, who thenceforth appeared to have lived more or less peacefully in their mountains and valleys. The Caliph of Bagdad seems also to have been propitiated by a large indemnity, and the sinister consequences of Al Roy's activities were gradually averted from the repentant insurgents.

Since this episode, little of historic interest has occurred among the Jews of Kurdistan. They still live in the villages and towns of the country, scattered among the

Kurdish clans, who frequently make war on one another, much to the danger of the more peaceful Jewish inhabitants. Few travellers have described their circumstances, and little was known of their condition until Benjamin II paid three visits to the country in the middle of the last century. He was obsessed by the idea that the Kurdish Jews were the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes, and all his researches appear to have been prompted by the desire to prove this theory; but his notes are extremely instructive and afford more information about these isolated Israelites than can be obtained from any other source.

Any estimate of the number of Jews of Kurdistan must be considered as merely approximate, owing to the problematical geographical conditions of the area and the scattered nature of the settlements, but according to a late authority the Jewish population at the commencement of the twentieth century was between 12,000 and 18,000 souls.[1]

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 585.

CHAPTER XIII

KURDISTAN (*continued*)

Mosul—The Jews of Amadia—The Shrine of Nahum—The Pentecost Celebrations—A Night in Nahum's Sepulchre—Kurdistan Under the Turks—The Jews in the Mountains—Benjamin II's Third Journey to Kurdistan—Present Conditions.

THE prophet Isaiah refers to the children of Israel "which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria", and there can be little doubt that there were many captives from Palestine in the region which was afterwards known as Kurdistan. It is conjectured that numbers of Jews lived in the mountainous districts of the land and rarely came into contact with their brethren who inhabited the cities of the plains. There they had lived, practically shut off from the outside world, for perhaps nineteen centuries, when they were visited by Benjamin of Tudela in the middle of the twelfth century. Benjamin describes the town of Mosul as being on the border of the Persian Empire and connected by a bridge over the Tigris with the ruins of Nineveh. The town had at that time a population of seven thousand

Jews, and among its inhabitants were " Rabbi Sakhai the Prince, a descendant of King David, and Rabbi Joseph, surnamed Borhan al Phulka, who is astronomer of Seifeddin, the brother of Nureddin, King of Damascus " Mosul is stated to be the city mentioned in the Bible as " Ashur, the great ", and was at this period, " of great extent ". At Ain Japhata, Benjamin states, he was shown the sepulchre of the prophet Nahum, but it seems probable that the old traveller was misinformed with regard to this tomb. A day's journey from this place, he mentions the grave of Rabbi Akibah, although it seems hardly probable that the famous martyr should have been buried so far off from the scene of his labours, and even the place of his martyrdom is unknown. Rudbar, or Robadhar, which Benjamin mentions as containing twenty thousand Jews, is a name applied to many districts in Persia which lie along the banks of a river. It is marked on modern maps near the confluence of the Kerkha and Abi-Sirvan rivers, a fact which is confirmed by Major Rawlinson. The town is situated in the Persian province of Luristan, and at the time of Benjamin's visit many rich and scholarly Jews resided there in circumstances not too comfortable. In this mountainous country were the districts of Holwan and Amadia, both of which contained large Jewish colonies. The inhabitants spoke the Syriac language, and many

excellent scholars resided among them or in the adjoining mountains of Chaphton (or Hafthan). This was David Al Roy's country, and here he fled when his followers were defeated.

The Jews of Amadia recognized the authority of the Persian Kings, but the residents of "the district of Mulehet"—five days' journey distant—acknowledged "the authority of the Prince of the Captivity, who resides at Bagdad", and who was certainly at that time under the jurisdiction of the Caliph of Baghdad. At this period, four Seljukian Princes ruled four kingdoms formerly under the absolute dominion of the Turkish Empire, viz., the Sultan of Baghdad, the Sultan (or King) of Persia, the Sultan of Syria, and the Sultan of Roum, or Asia Minor. The eastern Jews, while they acknowledged the supremacy of the territorial Sultan or Caliph, "gathered themselves together for all purposes of jurisdiction, under the control of a native ruler, a reputed descendant of David, whom they dignified with the title of 'The Prince of the Captivity'. If we are to credit the enthusiastic annalists of this imaginative people, there were periods of prosperity when the Princes of Captivity assumed scarcely less power than the ancient kings of Judah themselves".[1] In any case, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Kurdish Jews belonged more in

[1] Benjamin Disraeli, Preface to *Alroy*.

name than in reality to either the Caliphate of Baghdad or the Kingdom of Persia. " The inhabitants of the mountains entrenched behind those walls with which nature has provided them . . . adhered to their own life of freedom ", although they certainly paid some form of yearly tax or tribute to one or the other of the ruling emperors.[1] Finally, however, the limits of the possessions of the two adjoining nations were definitely agreed on and much of the internecine warfare in Kurdistan ceased, although the Kurds still led a semi-nomadic existence. There appears to have been no love lost between the Nestorians and the Jews, owing, in a measure, to the belief of the former in the blood accusations brought against the Jews from time to time.

When Benjamin II first visited Kurdistan in the middle of the nineteenth century, he remarked on " the happy condition of the Jews dwelling there—their freedom from all oppression, and the flourishing state of their temporal affairs ". This happy position of affairs, however, existed only in the mountainous districts ; in other parts of the country and in the towns they were not so well off. The traveller found many notable places in Kurdistan, and, in a town called Tanura, he was shown a grotto which Kurds and

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[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

Jews alike assured him had been the residence of the Prophet Elijah. He gives an interesting account of the ceremonies held a week before Pentecost at the grave of the prophet Nahum at Alkusch, at which period "the Jews from Mosel, Arnel, Arbil, Kirkup, from the Kurdish mountains, and from a still further distance", assemble to do honour to the memory of the seer. The sepulchre is in the Temple or Synagogue, "on a spot, parted off by railings", where there is a catafalque, covered with tapestry worked in gold, and ornamented with various coins, above which is a costly canopy. The pilgrims bring their manuscripts of the Law with them, and place them in the holy shrine of the Temple. The women then enter the chamber of the Prophet. After this the service begins. First the book of Nahum is read aloud from an old manuscript, which is laid on the catafalque; this finished, the pilgrims make a solemn procession seven times round the sacred shrine singing sacred songs. After the seventh round a hymn is sung addressed to the Prophet, the chorus of which is, "Rejoice in the joy of the Prophet Nahum". "Those men that accompany the procession follow in alphabetical order according to their various names. Then come the women who do not understand Hebrew, and recite the prayers translated for them into Arabic or Khurdish, and then dance round the catafalque singing. This

ceremony is performed enthusiastically and lasts for about an hour ".

Benjamin II also gives an account of the ceremonies connected with the feast of Pentecost,which commence on the eve of the first day by a service in the Synagogue which is lighted by a thousand lamps. Next day at dawn, all the men, armed with guns, pistols, and daggers, go to a mountain in the vicinity, where they read the Law and recite the " additional " service. They descend the mountain in warlike procession, and when they are at the foot " the whole community breaks up . . . and in Arabic fantasy, a war performance begins. The picturesque confusion, the combatants, their war cries, heard through the clouds of smoke—the clashing of weapons and the whole mimic tumult presents a fantastic spectacle, which is not without a certain dignity, and makes a strange impression on the spectator. This performance, which is of a very singular character and strikes the careful observer as something very peculiar, is not practised by the Jews in any other parts of the Globe ". After this part of the ceremonies of the day, which are supposed to represent the great war which will attend the coming of the Messiah, the procession is reinforced by the women of the town who come singing and dancing to meet the men. They then all return to the Synagogue and hold another service in memory of the

Prophet, after which they retire to their houses, until the Evening Prayers.

Benjamin II spent a night in the shrine, having hid under the draperies of the catafalque. He took the opportunity of examining a manuscript ascribed to the Prophet, but found nothing more than the prophecies found in the Bible, and there were no details respecting the parchment and the written characters dissimilar from those of other scrolls of the same nature to be found in Europe, Africa, or America. He did not, however, disillusionize the devotees of the Prophet, who were curious to learn what he had seen during his vigil, but he told the " Chachamin " all that had really occurred. The temple and shrine of Nahum appear to be closed throughout the year, with the exception of the period of the Pilgrimage, although visitors are admitted whenever they arrive.

Since the demarcation of the boundary and the establishment of the Turkish dominion in their portion of Kurdistan, the condition of the Jews has improved, and many of them have become wealthy. The country was under the jurisdiction of a Pasha, appointed by the Turkish Government, but these rulers were very arbitrary and exacting. The tribute to the Sublime Porte was a " mere trifle ", and appeared to be the only token of their subjection to the dominant race. In many parts of the mountainous districts,

Benjamin II remarks on the great ignorance displayed by the Jewish inhabitants with respect to their religion. At Birsani, where there were two hundred families, he found them so untaught " that they are not even capable of reciting a prayer, and nowhere . . . did I find them in such a debased state, and sunk in such moral turpitude, as here ". He gives a most interesting account of his first two expeditions to the Kurdistan mountains, which lasted in all fifty-five days. In the course of the second visit, he was involved in a quarrel with a Jewish official and had to save his life by flight. He also gives a description of Mosul (the town, he mentions, from which muslin takes its name), in which he found about four hundred and fifty Jewish families. He also visited Erbil where a hundred and fifty Jewish families resided, living amid considerable oppression and intolerance It is asserted that the community was sunk into a state of great ignorance ; the Jews spoke Arabic there and in Mosul, and the customs and dress of the two communities were identical

Benjamin's third journey to the Kurdistan mountains was not a lengthy affair, and practically the only important place he visited was Rowandis, a town built on a mountain at the foot of which flows a river known by the same name. He reported that the Jews of the place had considerably improved in condition since the rule of the Turks had been established. " Their dress

is more decent, their houses are better built, and certainly better kept than in other parts. . . ." Nevertheless in some of the remote villages in this part of the country they had to suffer many outrages from local officials who acted in defiance of the regulations of the Turkish authorities. They did not, however, appear to be badly off in material wealth, but were extremely ignorant in religious matters, and had no rabbis or teachers. The last place Benjamin visited was named Choi-Sandjak, where he found a Jewish population occupied in agricultural pursuits and in trade, and where the Jews were more industrious than in other places. The traveller concluded his account by remarking "these regions have been unexplored until now, and yet in many ways are they well worthy of investigation. . . . Thus ended my travels in Kurdistan. In my three expeditions to these wild and inhospitable regions I had exposed myself to such frequent and manifold dangers that I would not attempt further impossibilities. Thanks be to the Almighty who allowed me to return in safety after encountering so many hardships." [1]

The position of the Kurdistan Jews does not appear to have materially altered since the visits of Benjamin II nearly seventy years ago. They still appear to be oppressed by the local authorities or the police,

[1] *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

while nominally they are protected by Turkish or Persian laws. Of late years the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* has done some effective work in ameliorating their condition and has established schools, but the religious instruction of the girls does not go beyond the "Shemang". The Jewish inhabitants, generally speaking, are occupied as agents and storekeepers, and are not in very flourishing circumstances. "The Rabbis being ignorant and poor, have but little influence, and cannot correct the existing evils".[1]

Notes

The Tomb of Ezra.

I. "Three days' journey down the Tigris, in the middle of the desolate and barren desert El Ozeir, rises, on the shore of the river, a large square building, in which is the tomb of Ezra. The building is surrounded by some smaller houses, and contains two spacious rooms leading one into the other of which the first belongs to the Mussulmen, and the second together with the tomb to the Jews. A dim half-darkness reigns in the apartments into which a faint light from without is admitted through the door. There is a catafalque here, 16 feet long, 10 high, and 6 broad. Inscriptions, now illegible, cover all the four sides of this catafalque, over which are spread costly tapestries decorated with gold;

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii. p. 586.

and many rich decorations ornament the room. Although in the midst of the desert, and surrounded by tribes of Arab robbers, there is nothing to fear for the safety of these treasures. . . . The tomb of Ezra was for me an object of repeated inquiry; for as the Bible neither mentions his death nor the place of his burial, I entertained some doubts as to the identity of the tomb. From the Seder Hadoroth, and other historical works, I have however perfectly convinced myself of the fact. . . . The place of burial is not distinctly named by the Seder Hadoroth; I therefore keep to tradition, as, after a most accurate investigation, I could not find anything more correct. . . . Many Jews from Bagdad and Bassora celebrate the Feast of Weeks at the tomb of Ezra, and take part in the pious ceremonies. The Arabs know the object of these pilgrims, and place no hindrance in their way".[1]

The Fate of David Al Roy.

II. "When the King of Persia became acquainted with these circumstances, he sent and summoned David into his presence. The latter went without fear and when they met he was asked: Art thou the king of the Jews? to which he made answer and said: I am! Upon this the king immediately commanded, that he should be secured and put into prison in that place,

[1] Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*.

where the captives are kept who are imprisoned for life, situated in the city of Dabaristan, on the banks of the Kizil Ozein, which is a broad river.

" After a lapse of three days, when the king sat in council to take the advice of his nobles and officers respecting the Jews, who had rebelled against his authority, David appear'd among them, having liberated himself from prison without the aid of any one. When the king beheld him he inquired: who has brought thee hither or who has set thee at liberty? to which David made answer: my own wisdom and subtility, for verily I neither fear thee nor all thy servants. The king immediately commanded that he should be made captive, but his servants answer'd and said: we see him not and are aware of his presence only by hearing the sound of his voice. The king was very much astonished at David's exceeding wisdom, who thus addressed him: I now go my own way! and he went out followed by the king and all his nobles and servants to the banks of the river, where he took his shawl, spread it upon the water and crossed it thereupon. At that moment he became visible and all the servants of the king saw him cross the river on his shawl; he was pursued by them in boats but without success, and they all confessed, that no magician upon earth could equal him. He that day travelled to Amaria, a distance of ten days journey by the help of

the Shem Hamphorash and related to the astonished Jews all that had happen'd to him.

"This King of Persia afterwards sent to the Emir el Mumenin, the Khalif of Bagdad, principal of the Mohammedans, to solicit the influence of the Prince of the captivity and of the presidents of the colleges in order to check the proceedings of David El Roy, and threatening to put to death all Jews who inhabited his empire. The congregations of Persia were very severely dealt with about that time and sent letters to the Prince of the captivity and the presidents of the colleges at Bagdad to the following purpose: Why will you allow us to die and all the congregations of this empire; restrain the deeds of this man and prevent thereby the shedding of innocent blood. The Prince of the captivity and the president of the colleges hereupon addressed David in letters which run thus:

"'Be it known unto thee that the time of our redemption has not yet arrived and that we have not yet seen the signs by which it is to manifest itself, and that by strength no man shall prevail. We therefore command thee to discontinue the course thou hast adopted on pain of being excommunicated from all Israel'. Copies of these letters were sent to Sakhai, the Prince of the Jews in Mosul, and to R. Joseph the astronomer, who is called Borhanal-Fulkh and also resides there, with the request to forward them to David El Roy. The

last mention'd Prince and the astronomer added letters of their own, in which they advised and exhorted him ; but he nevertheless continued in his criminal career. This he carried on until a certain Prince of the name of Sin-el-Din, a vassal of the king of Persia, and a Turk by birth, cut it short by sending for the father-in-law of David-El-Roy, to whom he offer'd ten thousand florins if he would secretly kill David El Roy. This agreement being concluded, he went to David's house while he slept and killed him on his bed, thus destroying his plans and evil designs. Notwithstanding this the wrath of the king of Persia still continued against the Jews, who lived in the mountains and in his country, who in their turn craved the influence of the Prince of the captivity with the King of Persia. Their petitions and humble prayers were supported by a present of one hundred talents of gold, in consideration of which the anger of the King of Persia was subdued and the land was tranquilized".[1]

[1] *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. i, pp. 123-7.

CHAPTER XIV

MESOPOTAMIA

Hammurabi—The End of the Kingdom of Israel—Defeat of Sennacherib—The End of the Kingdom of Judah—The Restoration by Cyrus—Ezra.

THE ancient territory of Mesopotamia, whose history is so inextricably bound up with the great primeval Empires of Assyria and Babylonia, was originally a comparatively limited area. Indeed, to some extent, its geographical boundaries were indicated by its Grecian name, which showed that it was a tract of country *extending between two rivers*—the Euphrates and the Tigris. In this comparatively small region many important towns and settlements existed at various periods, and of these Babylon, Nineveh, Asshur, and later, Baghdad, Mosul, Bassorah and others brought fame and renown to a quarter particularly favoured by many resources, great facilities, and a generous climate. The primeval history of Mesopotamia is lost in mystery and obscurity. In Babylonia, the southern part of the region, a monument has been brought to light which records the existence of a potentate named Narâm-Sin who

flourished about 3750 B.C.[1] Some historians maintain that Nimrod, otherwise known as Belus, reigned in Assyria in the year 2554 B.C., and that he founded the Kingdom of Babylon some years later.[2] All kinds of legends and rabbinical stories connect Nimrod, the great hunter (and possibly the great monarch) with the Jewish patriarch Abraham, but the chronology of the period is extremely doubtful, and the dates do not agree.[3]

Hammurabi, or Khammuragas, of Babylon, who is supposed to have at one time united the Kingdoms of Assyria and Babylonia, is said to have flourished from 2342 to 2288 B.C.[4] Discoveries, made early in the present century, resulted in the publication of important evidence on this point, and Leonard King, of the British Museum, in particular claimed to have obtained conclusive proof of Professor Hammel's conjecture that Hammurabi reigned for forty-three years, namely from 1945 to 1902 B.C. Of the works attributed to this monarch (who is alleged to have been a benevolent despot), probably the greatest was his celebrated Judicial Code, which was rediscovered in the year 1902. The coincidence in the dates of the termination of Hammurabi's reign and the recovery of

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[1] Johns, *Ancient Babylonia.* [2] Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates.*
[3] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, pp. 309-10. [4] Other authorities have dated his first appearance at periods varying from 2250 to 2100 B.C.

his great code is very remarkable, but it is also worthy of notice that the patriarch Abraham may have been acquainted with the tenets of the Code, as, according to some authorities, " the call of Abram " took place in the year 1921 B.C., well within the reign of Hammurabi (according to King), although the Mosaic Code did not succeed its Babylonian forerunner until four hundred years had elapsed. If, however, as has been conjectured, Hammurabi was the monarch mentioned in the Bible as Amraphel, it is rather doubtful whether Abraham had ever been influenced by his code. Evidently the patriarch took part in the punitive expedition against the coalition of Kings, of which Amraphel was a member and which attacked the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and had taken prisoner Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham had emigrated to Canaan from Ur of the Chaldees, a town in Lower Mesopotamia, which in all probability was situated to the south-west of the western branch of the Euphrates River.

Hammurabi is credited with having united all Babylonia under one sceptre and of making the city of Babylon its capital. " From that proud position the city was never deposed; for even when the Assyrians ruled the land from the city of Nineveh, the city of Babylon was still the chief city of the Southern Kingdom. The development of the Kingdom which

Hammurabi had founded was continued during the second dynasty of Babylonia, at the end of which a foreign dynasty came to the throne"

The Kassites who came originally from Elam, or Persia, overran Babylonia in the year 1780 B.C., and during the subsequent five and three quarter centuries controlled the destinies of that Empire. In the course of this period, the Assyrian Empire was steadily growing in power. Early in the fourteenth century (B.C.), that powerful Assyrian monarch, Shalmaneser I, inaugurated a fresh era of conquest, and his son Tiglath Adler (or, as he is sometimes known, Tukulti Ninib I), conquered Babylonia (about 1270 B.C.). Then came a long period during which the histories of Assyria and Babylon are obscure, despite the numerous monumental and tabular discoveries brought to light in the nineteenth century.

Somewhere about the third decade of the twelfth century, a new light showed in the East, in the person of the renowned Tiglath Pileser, the first, in all probability, of his name. This monarch took good care to leave behind him a practically indelible account of his deeds, in the shape of the eight-sided prism of Tiglath-Pileser I, of which four copies were made and buried in the city of Asshur, in Assyria. Among other feats, he defeated and ravaged Babylonia and captured the city of Babylon about 1130 B.C. His victorious

arms were carried " as far as Kilikia and the Mediterranean ", while he finally took possession of Kurdistan and other territories.[1] Tiglath Pileser, who was renowned as a warrior, a builder, a hunter, and a town planner, died about 1120. The great town of Asshur was for the most part built according to his instructions, and the remains of the palaces which adorned his capital are still among the wonders of Mesopotamian antiquities. Soon after his death, the Babylonians struggled hard to obtain their freedom, and, for a time, succeeded. Indeed, it is stated that the lately subject race, led by its vigorous ruler Sibir, overran the land of its late oppressors. David, the warrior King of the Jewish nation " was enabled to carry the Israelitish arms as far as the banks of the Euphrates ". A battle ensued in which the Jews were led by the King in person, when forty-seven thousand of the Assyrians were killed. " The people of Mesopotamia, upon the miserable event of this overthrow, sent forthwith their ambassadors, with presents and addresses to David, and delivered themselves up ; and the action being over, David returned again safe to Jerusalem ".[2]

In these and other circumstances, the power of Assyria waned for a time. Its strength had been based on the individual energy and military skill of its

[1] Sayce, *Ancient Empires of the East.* [2] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, book vii, ch. vi.

monarchs, and as these depreciated in ability, the Empire declined in vigour. After the lapse of a century, however, Assyria came again to the front under the cruel, despotic, but energetic conqueror Assur-nat-sirpal whose success in foreign lands again enriched Assyria.

The siege and capture of Samaria have been attributed to Tiglath Pileser, Shalmaneser, and Sargon II, in turn, but in all probability, it was Sargon II who took Samaria in 719 or 720 B.C., after it had long been besieged by his predecessor, Shalmaneser. Sargon, " the constituted King ",[1] brought the campaign in the Kingdom of Israel to a conclusion, carried off 27,290 men, and settled his captives in the district of Gozan Halah. He filled Samaria and Galilee with colonists from Kutha, and other recently conquered lands. Israel became an Assyrian province with a merely titular King in the year 719. He was succeeded by his son Sennacherib at the end of the year 705 B.C., and a great task confronted the latter in the consolidation and diplomatic government of the great territories conquered and inherited by his predecessors. Sennacherib was well supported by able generals and governors, but many of his colonies were ripe for rebellion, and soon after, the whole of Palestine was in revolt. Sennacherib had as early as 707 B.C.

[1] Sayce, *Ancient Empires of the East.*

marched to Ascalon, where he had defeated an army composed of Ethiopian, Egyptian, and other troops. The coast being cleared, Sennacherib systematically reduced the land of Judah, capturing forty-six strong-walled cities and a large number of smaller towns. He deported 200,150 people and immense spoil. The Assyrian leader established himself at Lachish where he received the submission of the inhabitants of the country. Hezekiah was shut up in Jerusalem " like a bird in a cage, and strictly invested ". Finally, however, he came to terms with his powerful enemy, and Sennacherib took back immense booty to Nineveh.

Until further evidence from contemporary monuments is available, it is impossible to reconcile the biblical accounts of this period with Sennacherib's own story, as left behind on his prisms. From Assyrian sources we know nothing with certainty later than 691 B.C. It is probable, however, that the Assyrians invaded Palestine for the second time at the end of the seventh century B.C., and Sennacherib " sent a strong force to Jerusalem to demand its surrender " which " recognizing their inability to carry the city by storm, returned to Sennacherib. . . . Before a battle could be fought, a mysterious calamity befell the Assyrian army, which is said to have lost 185,000 men in a single night, while the remnant, fleeing in terror,

was pursued by the Egyptians".[1] Sennacherib is supposed to have led back the shattered remains of his force to Nineveh,[2] and he does not appear to have attempted any more campaigns in Palestine; his warlike career was, however, by no means ended, as he sacked the town of Babylon in 689 B.C., eight years before he was assassinated in his capital by two of his sons.

During the course of the seventh century, the rise of the Medes and the Persians was the outstanding feature of the history of the continent of Asia, and Cyaxares, a Median chief, reorganized the Median army and invaded Nineveh. Many years passed in the warfare, but finally Cyaxares won a great victory over Assur-bani-pal's generals, and again invaded Assyria and invested its great capital. In the meanwhile the Kingdom of Babylon was gradually coming into prominence again, and Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, had come to the throne in the year 604. He made war on Palestine, and finally captured Jehoiakim II, thus putting an end to the reign of the ruling house of Judah (circa 600 B.C.). Ten thousand Jews were transported from Jerusalem to Babylon, and eventually, after a further revolt in Palestine, the Kingdom was entirely broken up, the Holy City being destroyed, and the Kingdom of Judah finally brought to a close in the year 586 B.C.

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xi, p. 195. [2] Maspero, *The Passing of the Empires*.

Nebuchadnezzar had, in the first instance, been a humane conqueror, and many Jews had returned to Jerusalem from Egypt and Babylon since Jehoiakim's defeat. The Babylonian king, however, had been incensed by the constant revolts in Palestine, and eventually decided that no Judæans should be left in the Holy Land which "remained depopulated and deserted". Nebuchadnezzar treated the surviving Jewish refugees on the whole kindly and humanely. The Princes of the Royal House of Judah "were united as one whole in Babylonia, under their own government, according to the traditions of their own family", and probably received land and dwelling places for "those which they had forfeited in their own country".[1] On the other hand, the greater part of the Jews had been killed, and of the four millions which the nation is said to have numbered in the time of King David, "only about a hundred thousand remained".[1]

Nearly half a century had passed since Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem, and his deportation of its inhabitants, while hundreds of years had elapsed since Tiglath Pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib had initiated their systems of deportation. These ancient barbarians, however, treated their exiles well, and the latter gradually took up the position rather of colonists than of captives. Lands were allotted to them, and

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. i, p. 340.

they grew to love and own the soil they cultivated. When Cyrus made his offer to repatriate them, many did not wish to leave their already old homes, even to return to Palestine. The band of Jews who availed themselves of the Persian King's permission were enthusiasts, who valued the luxuries of Babylonia and the comforts of Mesopotamia less than their love for their ancient home.

After the death of Nehemiah, and for a period of over a century subsequently, the Mesopotamian Jews —the Judæans of the Euphrates and the Tigris—could no longer carry on an active intercourse with their brethren in the mother country, such as had previously existed. These exiles in Babylonia and Mesopotamia had led a quiet life for centuries. In all probability, the Babylonian Jews themselves were more patient than the Palestine Jews, which would account for their better treatment under Nebuchadnezzar. In any case the scattered communities settled between the Tigris and Euphrates had gradually established schools and seats of learning in the Babylonian country. Besides the heads of these schools, there was a political head or chief whom the Eastern Jews invested with a good deal of general authority, and whom they called the Head, or Prince of the Captivity. When Nineveh was destroyed by the Babylonians, there was probably a large Jewish colony in the city, consisting of the descendants of captives brought there by Tiglath

Pileser and other Assyrian potentates. It may be questioned whether the prophets Jonah and Nahum would have been inspired to warn the inhabitants of the Assyrian capital if there had not been a number of their brethren-in-faith in the famous city—warnings to the Gentiles are conspicuously scarce in the Old Testament.

It seems probable that Ezra, the Scribe, was for a time resident in Mesopotamia or in the neighbouring province of Khuzistan, and Benjamin of Tudela asserted, that when he died, he was " a courtier in the retinue of Artaxerxes II ", in fact he was on a journey to pay a visit to the court when he met with his death. Artaxerxes is said to have given Ezra a commission to bring with him to Jerusalem all the captives that remained in Babylon, but this authorization was evidently not carried into effect, as large numbers of Jews remained in Babylonia and Mesopotamia after Ezra's expedition left for Palestine.

The name of Mesopotamia, as applied to the whole of the regions hitherto dealt with in this section, came into use soon after the time of Alexander the Great, about the same time as the general name of Babylonia was given to a great part of a district which embraced the towns of Babylon, Borsippa, Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and Pumbaditha ; Basra, however, was not included in the district of Babylonia. The Province of Babylonia, or Irak, was largely populated by Jews ; but in

course of time, the non-Jewish population grew to be the majority. For about the first five centuries of the Christian Era, the history of the Babylonian Jews "was almost that of the happy nations who have none. . . . In Mesopotamia, for a very long period, Jews as Citizens were undistinguishable from other citizens . . . and they on their side . . . respected the law of the land no less than the law of Moses.".[1] "The peculiar formation of the country between the Euphrates and the Tigris, facilitated the separation of Judaism from its primitive scene of action", and it "became a second fatherland for the homeless nation". The exiles after their many centuries of settlement, had acquired studious, plodding, energetic habits; the successive leaders and principals of the schools showed them the paths of profound wisdom, and impressed on them the seal of elevated thought.[2] Nominally, under the jurisdiction of Persia, most of the Jews of Babylonia were under the practical rule of their own Princes of the Captivity, and, as a matter of fact, "the greatness of their numbers invested the Babylonian Jews with a certain amount of independence, and they seemed in this country almost as if in a land of their own".[2]

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[1] Lady Magnus, *Outlines of Jewish History.* [2] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. ii, p. 509.

CHAPTER XV

MESOPOTAMIA (*continued*)

The Academy of Sora—The Exilarchs—Persecution—The Completion of the Babylonian Talmud—The Princes of the Captivity—The Arabian Conquest—The End of the Gaonate—David Alroy—The Visits of Petachiah of Ratisbon and of Benjamin of Tudela—Unsettled Conditions—The Jews of Kurdistan—Mosul—The Ottoman Turks.

THE great college of Sora in Babylonia was founded by the famous Rab, otherwise known as Abba-Areka, who had been appointed to the post of inspector of markets in Babylonia by the Prince of the Captivity, but who probably resigned his official appointments under the government when the Academy was opened in the year 219. He had twelve hundred disciples, many of whom he maintained, as he was a wealthy man and possessed large estates. Rab carried out many reforms, and was greatly revered throughout the whole of the country. About the middle of the third century, Mesopotamia fell again under direct Persian sway, the Sassanian monarch, Sapor I, having conquered the country about the year 258. By him the Jews were deprived of many privileges, which were, however, gradually restored.

The activities of Rab, and of Mar Samuel, had greatly improved the morale of the Babylonian Jews, and had introduced among them a love for the study of the Law and a commensurate scorn of those who were ignorant of Jewish literature and Jewish history. As a matter of fact, the Jews of " Babylonia had practically become a regular Jewish state, whose constitution was the Mishna, and whose public props were the Prince of the Captivity, and the school assembly ".[1] At the close of the third century, the Academy of Sora lost its brightest ornament in the person of Huna II, the scholastic successor of the famous Rab. For a long period, however, a third Babylonian city had taken rank as a centre of Jewish theological study, and Nahardea remained a famous academy until beyond the middle of the third century. The town had long guarded the accumulated treasure gathered from the whole of Persia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and other countries, for the benefit of the temple and the schools of Jerusalem,[2] but the city was swept away in the year 259.

Although the Exilarchs claimed that they had an unbroken line since the dethronement of the Jewish King Jehoiakim, their advent to wealth and power was gradual, and they only came into prominence after the Parthians had taken possession of Mesopotamia.

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. ii, p. 551. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 510.

At the height of his authority, the Prince of the Captivity "was the supreme Judge of the Jewish Communities . . . and this power was . . . little restrained or regulated by law". . . .[1] Disputes constantly arose between the Exilarchs and the heads of the colleges, and finally the importance of the Babylonian Jewish schools began to decline, although the advent of the great Ashi revived for a time their ancient glories.

Persecution of the Jews in Babylonia broke out under the rule of Jezdijird II of Persia, and in his successor's reign, the Prince of the Captivity, Mar Zutra, and some teachers of the law were thrown into prison and executed (470 A.D.). "They were the first martyrs on Babylonian soil, and it is a significant fact that a Prince of the Captivity bled for Judaism".[2] The persecutions continued during the reign of Firuz, but after that monarch's death the Babylonian communities took heart again and the ancient organization was again restored. The end of the fifth century saw the definite completion of the Babylonian Talmud (called also the Gemara) on the 13th of Kislev or 2nd of December 499.

But although persecutions broke out from time to time under the dynasty of the Sassanians, these monarchs had not leisure to occupy themselves with

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. ii, p. 515. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 636.

the Jewish population of their shattered empire. Thus the Jews, to a certain extent, escaped public notice. They elected a new Prince of the Captivity, the office having been vacant since Mar Zutra had been executed in the year 520, or ten years later as many authorities contend. The Schools of the Law were re-opened either in the reign of Chosroes or of Hormazd, and, to all appearance, the Babylonian Jews were restored to their prosperity and their prince resumed his state. The names of three of these Princes of Captivity are known to history, viz., Kafnai, Chaninai, and Bostanai (circa 589). The last of these succeeded in again investing the dignity with substantial power.

Throughout these centuries Mesopotamia was constantly being conquered and reconquered, being in turn the prize of the Byzantine and of the Persian Empires, but the second quarter of the seventh century brought a more recently established power on the scene, and for many centuries subsequently the Arabians dominated the land which had seen so many struggles and so many changes. Omar I, the second Caliph, took the town of Sus about 640, and " gave orders for the reverential maintenance of the tomb of Daniel in this the scene of his memorable vision ' by the river of Ulai ' ; and here, to the present day, the pious care of succeeding generations has preserved his

shrine on the river bank through thirteen centuries of incessant change ".[1] A prominent personage at Omar's court was the ci-devant Yemenite Israelite Ka'b Al-Ahbar, who became a great lecturer on Mohammed and the Koran. He is said to have predicted the death of Omar, three days before the assassination of the Caliph. Omar, despite his notorious " pact ", recognized the help that had been rendered him by the Jews, who, together with the Nestorian Christians, had given him much assistance in his later campaigns. The greater part of the population living near the Tigris and the Euphrates were either Jews or Christians, and Omar not alone provided the exilarch Bostanai with a wife of great rank, but he officially acknowledged his title and position, he being the first Jew thus recognized by the Mohammedans.

For a considerable period, the Jews in Mesopotamia enjoyed an epoch which Milman describes as the " Golden Age of Judaism ". It is true that their brethren were persecuted in Arabia and Yemen, but elsewhere under the rule of the Caliphs they lived in peace and prosperity. " The Jewish commonwealth of Babylonia, notwithstanding its dependence on the humours of an Islam governor and the caprice of its own supporters, seemed nevertheless to those at a distance as though surrounded with a halo of power

[1] Muir, *Annals of the Early Caliphate.*

and greatness ".[1] Even the sorrow of the Jews throughout the world at " their dispersion to all corners of the earth was mitigated by the thought that by the rivers of Babylon . . . a Jewish commonwealth still existed ".[2] The Exilarchate had been hereditary in the family of Bostanai from his death until the formation of the Karaite schism by Anan ben David—himself a descendant of Bostanai. After the Karaite disturbances, the position of Exilarch became elective, and the Prince of the Captivity was chosen by an election which was directed by the Presidents of the Jewish Academies. Thus the dignity became dependent upon the Gaonate, or the heads of the Schools of Sora and Pumbaditha, and the bitter disputes in which these authorities so constantly were involved soon weakened both the Exilarchate and the Gaonate.

Under the rule of Caliph Yezid I and his early successors, the Jews, not alone of Mesopotamia, but throughout his entire dominions, " enjoyed a full and absolute peace. The Prince of the Captivity reigned with almost as great an authority as if he had been King ". As a matter of fact the Jews under the Caliphs were very well treated until the commencement of the ninth century, when they suffered in the civil war which broke out after the death of Haroun Alraschid (809 A.D.). Many of the Abbassid Caliphs

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iii, pp. 101-2. [2] *Ibid.*

treated the Jews well, and Bagdad, which was founded or at all events re-established by Al Mansar in the middle of the eighth century, soon became a favourite habitation for them. The disputes between the Exilarchs and the Gaonate continued to do much injury to the community at large, and in the ninth and tenth centuries these quarrels became still more frequent and embittered. Many of the Caliphs now openly oppressed the Jews, and the latter's disunion was a prominent factor in their weakness and in the facility with which they were now assailed from many quarters. From time to time a brief recrudescence of power attached itself to a solitary exilarch—the chance favourite of a degenerate ruler—but the seemingly inevitable contentions arose again, and finally the Exilarchate was brought to an end some time before the middle of the tenth century.

The Abbaside Caliph, Mutawakkil, was a bitter foe to Christians and Jews alike. He was a bigot in religion, and under his régime " the sumptuary laws . . . long fallen into desuetude under the tolerant reigns preceding, were now imposed with the utmost stringency and with new marks of degradation ". Jews were " debarred from offices of state . . . to such an extent did intolerance march hand in hand with orthodoxy ".[1] In the circumstances, it is little to be

[1] Muir, *The Caliphate*, pp. 525-6.

wondered the office of Exilarch, or Prince of Captivity, was abolished soon after Mutawakkil came to the throne; after it had played a prominent part in Mesopotamia for about seven centuries, where it had served as a "kind of political independence for Judaism".[1] Only a short period before the termination of the Exilarchate, one of the greatest of the Gaonim of Sora, the illustrious Saadia, had passed away (circa 942). After the death of this great chief, the Academy fell into decay, and it was finally closed, its principal retiring to Bassorah in 948. Pumbaditha, however, still kept the doors of its university open, although it was manifestly clear that the leadership of Judaism was lost to Asia, since Spain had become the great centre of Jewish ecclesiastical and educational progress and vigour. Nevertheless, Sherira, chief judge and afterwards Gaon of Pumbaditha, succeeded in maintaining something of the former influence of the college for its students until about the end of the tenth century. At this period, he was succeeded by his son Hai, who, after some dangerous experiences, appears to have become firmly secured in his position as Gaon, which he maintained until the year 1036, when he died, mourned by Jews far and wide. Another Gaon was chosen, but the end was near, and the last of the Gaonim, Hezekiah or Ezechias, was cast into

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iii, p. 206.

prison, and subsequently executed. Two years after the death of Hai, the Academies were formally closed and the supremacy of Babylonian Jewry collapsed.

For considerably over a century, little is heard of the Jews of Mesopotamia, and the power and pomp assumed by the Exilarchs and the Gaonim, no longer excited the jealousy of the rulers of the province. Indeed, there is no further mention of a Prince of the Captivity until those renowned Jewish travellers, Petachiah and Benjamin of Tudela, threw some light on the obscurity which prevailed over Eastern Jewry at the end of the twelfth century. The effacement of the colleges at Pumbaditha, Sora, and Nahardea did not, however, greatly diminish the Jewish population. "The Bagdad congregation contained 1,000 Jewish families, with four synagogues, and lived in undisturbed quiet as in the best days of the Caliphate. . . . The Congregation of Mosul was still more considerable than that of Bagdad. It numbered nearly 7,000 families", and was protected by the great military leader Prince Zenki.[1]

Sultan Mohamet Almuktafi, or Mucthepi, as Basnage styles him, was the great patron and protector of Chasdai, the famous Exilarch of Bagdad. Almuktafi had revived the post for his friend Chasdai, and all the Jews of Mesopotamia took heart once more and basked

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iii, p. 442.

in the light of their champion's prosperity. Almuktafi died in 1159, but Sultan Mostanged, his successor, also protected the Jews during his ten years' reign, which came to an end a little before the insurrection of David Alroy disturbed Jewish conditions in the East. In all probability, Alroy found many supporters among the Jews of Bagdad, as well as among his wild and semi-savage co-religionists of Northern Mesopotamia, his early life in the city of the Caliphs having brought him many friends and admirers there. The meteoric career of Alroy once over, the prosperity of the Jews of Bagdad soon increased. The second of the new line of Exilarchs, Daniel, raised the status of the Talmudical College to such a pitch, that the community was reminded of the palmy days of Pumbaditha and Sora, and the communal chief, Samuel, son of Ali Halevi, the Gaon, became a person of very considerable importance. In the disputes for the post of Prince of Captivity which arose after the death of the Exilarch Daniel (circa 1175), Samuel ben Ali worked unceasingly for the assumption of all religious and judicial power by the Gaonate. His sway at this period extended "over all the Asiatic congregations from Damascus to India, and from the Caspian Sea to Arabia".[1] So great was the fame of Mesopotamian Jewry once more that the traveller Petachiah records

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iii, p. 453.

that he met the ambassadors sent to the Gaon Samuel ben Ali from Armenia, asking him to provide " Jewish religious teachers for their country, that they might instruct the people in the tenets of Judaism " ; and Graetz maintains that " the traveller Petachya, who has recorded these facts, is a trustworthy witness ", and that he saw " the ambassadors from the Caucasian hills with his own eyes ".[1]

Benjamin of Tudela considered Racca (or Rakka) on the confines of Mesopotamia as the frontier town between that country and the empire of the Thogarmin (later on known as the Turks). He journeyed from Aleppo to Bagdad viâ the river El-Khabour, the Chabor of Scripture, and the Chabur of modern maps. He mentions two synagogues which he saw on this route, both of which were said to have been erected by Ezra ; but Basnage, commenting on the Jewish traveller's remarks, says, " He pass'd into Mesopotamia, where he saw a synagogue which Esdras had built, when he left Babylon to return to Jerusalem ; *which is ridiculous* ". At this period, Mosul is stated to have contained about seven thousand Jews, and Okbera, a city founded by " Jekhomiah, King of Jehuda ", about ten thousand, while Chadrah boasted of a Jewish population of fifteen thousand. Benjamin's estimate of the Jewish population of Bagdad, must, however,

[1] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iii. p. 453.

have been altogether wrong. A city which contained ten Jewish colleges and twenty-eight synagogues would probably have contained more than one thousand Jews (according to Asher's version), or even one thousand families (according to other authorities).[1] Moreover, in an adjacent place called Resen, there were five thousand resident Jews, while in Babylon, or the district known by that name, there were twenty thousand Jews, and in Hillah, five miles distant, ten thousand more with four synagogues. Basnage observes that "the Jews were very low in the East, in the twelfth century . . . they had not been able to restore themselves since the misery that befel them above a hundred years before: For they were found only in a small number, upon the Banks of the Euphrates, and in the ancient Cities; where sometimes there were reckoned nine hundred thousand". He seems to have considered that Benjamin of Tudela exaggerated the power of the Exilarch, and says, "I question whether the Dignity of the Prince of Captivity was so considerable at that time".

On the other hand, Benjamin asserts that at that period "the authority of the Prince of the Captivity extended over the following countries, viz., over Mesopotamia; Persia; Khorassan; S'ba, which is Yemen; Diarbekh; all Armenia, and the Land of

[1] *Benjamin of Tudela's Itinerary.*

Kota near Mount Ararat; over the country of the Alanians . . . over Sikbia and all the provinces of the Turkmans . . . over the country of the Georgians . . . and as far as the frontiers of the provinces and cities of Tibet and India". Although the Babylonian Jewish colleges had been destroyed about a century before the date of Benjamin's visit, some vestiges of the Jewish settlements appear to have still existed, specially at El Jubar, the former Pumbaditha, where it is stated three thousand Jews still resided, and the synagogues, colleges, and sepulchres of the celebrated leaders Rab and Mar Samuel were seen by the Jewish traveller. At Sora, however, only sepulchres are mentioned. Benjamin gives us considerable information respecting the independent, or semi-independent, Jewish districts, and remarks that "twenty-one days' journey through the desert of Sh'ba or Al-Yemen, from which Mesopotamia lies in a northerly direction, are the abodes of the Jews who are called B'ne Rekhab, men of Thema". The Jews of Tehama, and of Thelmas appear to have been governed by a Prince called Sal'mon, who, with his brother Prince Chanan, "are descendants of the royal house of David", but who, "in doubtful cases . . . solicit the decisions of the Prince of Captivity". The province occupied by these Jews is stated to have been inhabited by three hundred thousand people, and was known as Thanaejm. It

contained " forty cities, and two hundred villages, and one hundred small towns ". The city of Thanaejm was fifteen square miles in extent and contained the palace of Prince Sal'mon, while Thelmas was strongly fortified and a population of one hundred thousand Jews resided in its precincts. Only three days' journey from Thelmas was Chaibar, a large town with a Jewish population of fifty thousand, and it is remarked that " the people of this city are valiant and engaged in wars with the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, with those of the northern district and with those of Yemen ".

The alliance between the Jews of northern Mesopotamia and the " Caphar Tarac or infidel Turks " has been previously referred to, and the understanding then arrived at probably influenced the favourable treatment of the Jews by the Turks, when the wandering tribes began gradually to consolidate themselves into a nation. During the middle years of the twelfth century, three great rulers commanded the destinies of western and part of central and southern Asia, viz., Sandjar, ruler of Eastern Persia ; Masud, grand Sultan of Baghdad ; and Zenki, who held sway over Mesopotamia. In all probability the ruling Caliph at Bagdad at the time of the visit of Benjamin of Tudela was Mostandjed, who died in December 1170 and was succeeded by Mostadhi, but the Caliphate was now greatly weakened, and twenty years later Saladin, the

great Saracen leader, was virtually master of Egypt, Palestine, and the whole of Mesopotamia ".[1]

The impending fall of the Abbaside dynasty was patent to all the Eastern world, and the general insecurity of the country was heightened by the wars of the crusades and the Mongol menace. Many Jews travelled westwards and gradually drifted to Europe, and although a temporary improvement in their condition occurred in the latter part of the thirteenth century at Bagdad, as a general rule, " in all countries in which Arabic or Persian was spoken " (at this period) " Jews led an obscure, dependent and humiliating existence ".[2] Al-Musta'sim, or Mosthadem, who commenced his reign in the year 1242, was the last of the real caliphs, and after he had been on the throne for sixteen years, his dominions were overrun by Hulagu, the Mongol warrior. He was put to death in 1258 and the Abbasid dynasty passed away, although a shred of its dignity and power remained with the Egyptian " caliphs ", who for two and a half centuries exercised a shadow of a rule under the control of the Egyptian Sultans, who left them hardly a trace of responsibility or command.[3]

In the last quarter of the twelfth century, and in the first half of the thirteenth, the city of Aleppo had still

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[1] Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin.* [2] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ii, p. 210. [3] Muir, *The Caliphate.*

a considerable Jewish population, and was visited by Benjamin of Tudela (1173), Petachiah of Ratisbon (circa 1180). and Alharizi (circa 1230). They all estimated the Jewish population of the town (which is on the borders of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor) at about fifteen hundred, which, however, was probably not a tithe of the number of its former Jewish inhabitants. Considerable information is afforded respecting the north-east part of Mesopotamia at this period, and it is conjectured that numbers of Jews lived in the adjacent mountains and inhabited the country known later as Kurdistan. Many of these people, it is believed, were descendants of those who had come there on their exile by the ancient Assyrian monarchs, but few travellers recorded their existence until they were visited by Benjamin of Tudela, nineteen centuries after their first deportation to the land.

Mosul, which at the time of Benjamin of Tudela's visit, was described as being on the Persian border, is reported to have then possessed a Jewish population of seven thousand souls, the city having been situated on the banks of the Tigris and connected by a bridge over it with the ruins of Nineveh. The Jewish traveller maintains that in the confines of the town were the synagogues of Obadiah and of Nahum. A century after Benjamin's visit, the Jewish community in the town was still flourishing and even boasted of an

Exilarch, a certain Rabbi David ben Daniel, who also claimed to be a descendant of David. He was a doughty defendant of the principles of Maimonides, and he, together with his rabbinical council, threatened Solomon Petit of Acre with excommunication on account of his opposition to the creed of the great Rabbi.[1] The Mongols were now rulers of Mesopotamia, and although some of their Sultans adopted the Mohammedan faith, the Caliphs attained to no importance during their régime. Some of the Sultans of Mongol race were favourably disposed to the Jews, who had been dispersed, but had settled down again, but after the death of the Sultan Argoun, the little that is known of their condition is unfavourable. In the year 1400, Bagdad was besieged by Tamerlane, and many Jews who had taken refuge there from other villages perished. In the course of the next year, the Jewish quarter at Aleppo was pillaged by the Mongols, and it is said that ten thousand Jews fell in Bassorah, Mosul, and Hisn-Kef under the ferocious sword of the Tartar ruler.

In the meantime, a new power was rising in the East, and the Ottoman Turks gradually conquered a large part of Asia and Africa, which now came under the dominion of the Osmanlis, Aleppo being taken by Selim I in the year 1516. Practically the whole of

[1] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 97.

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia was added to the Turkish dominion by Solyman I, and the rest of that country, together with the surrounding territory now known as Kurdistan, fell under the Turkish rule about the middle of the sixteenth century. Thus for the greater part of four centuries Mesopotamia formed part of the Turkish Empire, and took its due share in its periods of prosperity and of distress. During that time great changes took place with regard to the Jewish population, and while that of Bagdad increased very considerably and Aleppo advanced, the number of Jews in Amadia and Bassorah sensibly decreased.

Pedro Teixeira, the Portuguese traveller, who journeyed to the East at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, left some account of the Jews of Mesopotamia and other parts of Turkey at this period. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Benjamin II traversed much of the same ground, proceeding in addition to the wilder districts of North-East Mesopotamia, to which the earlier traveller did not penetrate. Among the regions visited by Benjamin II were the mountainous districts of Kurdistan, and in the course of his journeys he went to Mosul and the ruins of Nineveh, Erbil, Kirkup, finally making his way to Bagdad, Kefil, and Bassorah. In many of these places he found the Jews badly treated and ignorant to the extreme. In the

mountainous districts they were in a condition similar to that in force in feudal times and had to perform "serf-service . . . without receiving or being entitled to demand the smallest compensation for their labour". Benjamin II was obsessed by the idea that the Kurdish Jews were the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes, and all his researches appear to have been prompted with a view of proving this theory. His notes, however, are interesting and instructive and afford more information about these isolated Israelites than can be obtained from any other source.

According to Turkish Government statistics published in 1904, the Jewish population of Mesopotamia was about sixty thousand, of which Bagdad possessed forty thousand. Mosul, in one table, is put down at two thousand, and in another at six thousand, while Aleppo is included in Asia Minor, and Bassorah is only estimated to contain fifteen hundred Jews.

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INDEX

ABBA-AREKA, 216, 217, 228
Abbas the Great, 80-84, 89-90
Abbas II, 84-86
Abrahams, Dr. Israel, cited, 44
Abyssinia, 168-170
Aden, 178-179
Adler, Mr. E. N., cited, 28-29, 33, 70, 86, 105, 126-128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 179
Adler, Marcus N., cited, 147-148
Africa, Catholics in South, 96-97
Ahasuerus, 76
Ahmedabad, 124
Alanians, Country of the, 228
Aleppo, 32-35, 37, 230, 232, 233, 234
Aleni, Father Julius, 139
Alexander the Great, 78
Alharizi, 231
Alkusch, *see* ELKOSH
Alliance Israélite Universelle, 199
Almuktapi, Sultan Mahomet, 224-225
Alroy, David, 185-188, 192, 200-203
Amadia, 185, 191, 192, 233
Ana, 32
Antiochus the Great, 133
Armenia, 226, 227
Army, Jews in the, 125
Ashi, 218
Ashkenazi, Solomon, 7-10

BAGDAD, 31, 80, 222, 224, 225, 226-227, 232, 233, 234
Basnage, cited, 5-6, 23, 63, 64, 80, 130-131, 159-160, 227
Basra (Bassorah), 30, 232, 233, 234
Beaconsfield, Lord, cited, 192
Beni-Israel, 103-108, 115-117, 123-125, 129-130
Benjamin of Tudela, 31, 89, 104, 108, 117, 172, 183, 185, 190-191, 214, 226, 227-228, 231
Benjamin II, 30, 88, 90-91, 99, 104-105, 124, 125-126, 129-130, 154, 165, 183, 189, 193-198, 233-234
Bertinoro, Obadiah di, 57
Biddulph, William, cited, 58-59, 63-64
Birsani, 197
Blount, Henry, 40-42
Bombay, 112, 124
Botero, Giovanni, 31
Broben, O. F. Vander, cited, 71
Brotier, Father, 134
Broussa (Brusa), 2

CABRAL, Pedro, 118
Calcutta, 112
Cardoso, Abraham Michael, 23
Caro, Joseph, 4, 57-58
Centacola, 120
Ceylon, 134
Chadrah, 226
Chaibar, 229
Chardin, Jean (Sir John), 94-95
Chasdai, 224
Chendamangalam, 119
China, 133-163
Choi-Sandjak, 198
Cochin, Jews of, 99-103, 109-111, 114, 119, 120, 121, 122-123, 126-128, 130-131, 132
Cohen, Nehemiah, 20
Constantinople, 24, 27, 36, 39-40
Costume of the Jews of Palestine, 65-66, 72; Syria, 67; Turkey, 37, 38, 42, 43, 44
Cranganore, Jews of, 99, 101, 102, 105, 109, 113, 118, 119, 125-126, 128-129, 131
Cyrus, 74-75, 77

DAMASCUS, 37, 57
Damascus, Migration from, 2
Dandini, Jerom, 66-68
Daniel, Tomb of, 219

Index

Darius, 75-76
David, King of Israel, 208
Decan, 120
Dhu Nuwas, 167-169, 171, 172, 174, 176
Divakar, Samuel, 124
Diarbekh, 227
Dönmeh, 24 note, 29
Dulcigno, 23
Dutch, Jews assist the, 110
EL JUBAR, 228
Elkosh (Alkusch), 183, 194
Erbil, 197
Evelyn, John, cited, 44
Exilarchs, the, *see* PRINCE OF THE CAPTIVITY
Ezekiel, Tomb of, 30-31
Ezra, 77-78, 165, 175, 184, 214
Ezra, Tomb of, 182, 184, 199-200
FATH ALI SHAH, 96
Febre, Michel, 42-43
Finn, James, cited, 150-151
GAONATE, the, 221, 222, 223-224, 225
Georgia, 228
Goa, 119
Gonzani, Father, 134, 135
Graetz, cited, 4, 23, 56-57
Guignes, de, cited, 135
HA-COHEN, Joseph, cited, 8-10
Hadrian, Emperor, 53-54
Hai, 223
Hammurabi, 205-207
Hang-Chow, 139, 151
Harris, Mr. W. B., cited, 177
Hebrew, Spoken language, 39
Herbert, Sir Thomas, 92-93
Hillah, 227
Hisn-Kef, 232
Holwan, 191
Huna II, 217
INDIA, 98-132, 228
Ispahan, 88-89, 91-92, 94
JEHOSAPHAT, Valley of, 69
Jehrun, 92-93
Jerusalem, 4, 53-56, 57, 60-62, 63, 69-72, 74, 77
Joseph of Naxos, *see* NASI, JOSEPH
Joseph, Raphael, 14, 61
Jost, I. H., cited, 99, 101, 123, 173
Judah-Ha-Chasid, 71
Jusoreh, near Mount Sinai, 35
Justinus I, 169
KAI-FUNG-FOO, 137, 138, 139, 140, 144-159, 160-163
Karachi, 124
Karaite secession, 221
Karaite Synagogue, 70
Khorassan, 227
King, Leonard, cited, 205
Konkan Country, Jews of the, *see* BENI-ISRAEL
Kota, Land of, 228
Kurdistan, 181-203, 231, 233
LAR, 93
Lavender, Theophilus, 36, 38-39
Le Blanc, Vincent, 35-36, 120-121
Le Bruyn, Corneille, cited, 69
Lehmann, Colonel, 156-157
Liebermann, J. L., cited, 156-157
Linschoten, Jan Huyghen Van, 118-119
Lurya, Isaac, 58, 60
M'AM OÇEM, 30
Malabar Jews, *see* COCHIN and CRANGANORE
Mar Samuel, 217, 228
Mar Zutra, 218, 219
Marranos, 4, 27
Menahemites, the, 188
Menasseh ben Israel, 14
Mesopotamia, 204-234
Mexat Aly, 31
Mexat Oçem, 30
Mills, Mr. D. J., cited, 155
Milman, H. H., cited, 76-77
Miquez João, *see* NASI, JOSEPH
Mosul, 190-191, 197, 224, 226, 231, 233, 234
Mutawakkil, Caliph, 222-223
NACHMANIDES, 55
Nahardea, 217
Nahum, 183
Nahum, Tomb of, 191, 194-196
Najiran, 168, 169, 170

Index

Nan-King, 151
Nasi, Joseph, 4-7, 60
Nathan Ghazzati, 15, 16
Nebuchadnezzar, 74, 211-212
Nehemiah, 77
Nicholay, Nicholas, 26-28
Nineveh, 183, 213, 233

OKBERA, 226
Omar, Caliph, 54, 219, 220
Oppert, Gustav, cited, 126-128

PALESTINE, 52-72, 75, 78, 173, 180
Paroor, Travancore, 114, 115
Pekin, 159
Persia, 73-97, 227
Petachiah, 224, 225-226, 231
Phineas of Abyssinia, 171
Physicians, Jewish, 28
Poona, 124
Portuguese, Persecution by the, 109, 110
Prince of the Captivity, the, 192, 213, 215 217, 218, 219, 221, 222, 223, 225, 227-228
Pumbaditha, 223, 228

RAB, *see* ABBA-AREKA
Rabban, Joseph, 100, 101, 114, 126-129
Rahabi, David, 103-104, 106-108, 115-117
Resen, 227
Reubeni, David, 70
Ricci, Father Matteo, 139
Rowandis, 197
Rudbar (Robadhar), 191

SAADIA, 223
Sabbathai Zevi, 11-24, 45-51, 61, 84-85
Safed, 24, 39, 57-59, 64
Salonica, 28-29, 39
Samaritans, 65, 75
Samen, Jewish state of, 171, 172, 176
Samuel ben David, 70
Samuel, Gaon, 225
Samuel, Mr. S. R., cited, 105
Sanaa, 176, 178, 179
Sandys, George, cited, 2, 39, 64-66
Sargon, King of Abyssinia, 73, 209
Sargossi, rabbi of Safed, 57
Sasportas, Jacob, 17
Saturday Oilmen, 104
Semah, Jacob, 112
Sennacherib, 209-211
Seripul, 185
Shiraz, 90, 94, 94-95
Sholal, Isaac Cohen, 55-56
Shulchan Oruch, the, 4
Sikbia, 228
Smith, George, cited, 148-149, 152-154
Solomon ben Nathan, 7-10
Solyman, Sultan, 56
Sora, College of, 216, 217, 228
Stavorinus, John Splinter, cited, 110, 121-122
Surat, 112

TACHARD, Guy, 96
Talmud, Babylonian, 218
Tamerlane, 79, 232
Tavernier, Jean Baptiste, 94
Tehama (Thema), 228
Teixeira, Pedro, 29, 31, 32, 89, 233
Thanaejm, 228-229
Thelmas, 229
Thevenot, John de, cited, 5, 43-44, 68, 90, 91-92
Tiberias, 4-5, 59
Tibet, 228
Tiglath-Pileser, 181, 207-208
Tripoli in Syria, 66-67
Turkey, 1-51
Turkmans, the, 228

UDAL, 178
Urkham, Sultan, 2

VALLE, Pietro della, 33-35
Vital, Haim, 60

XERXES, 76-77

YEMEN, the, 164-180, 227, 228

ZANTE, 37-38
Zarfati, Isaac, 3
Zerubbabel, 75

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